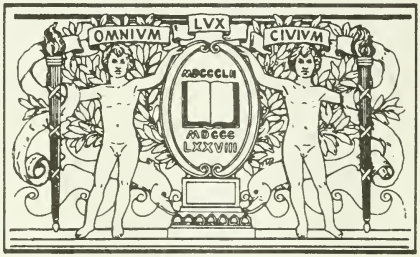

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FAR UP IN THE BOW OF THE STEAMER.

With the Flag at Panama

A story of the Building of the Panama Canal

By

HUGH C. WEIR

Illustrated by

W. F. STECHER

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With the Flag in Panama

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INTRODUCTION

TO my readers:—

It was while Shanton and I laid under the waving palm trees of the Picara, with a sixteen-foot 'gator as one result of our day's shooting, sprawled on the mud-bank, that the story of Rod Standish and his adventures at the Panama Canal first suggested itself. The character of Shanton in the following story is that of my friend, Colonel Shanton, now Chief of the Insular Police of Porto Rico, and most of the camp-fire yarns of my book were the true stories told me by Shanton in our wanderings through Panama. I wish that you could all know him personally. He is the ideal type of man of the red-blooded American boy, who loves the great out-of-doors—Rough Rider, champion bronco-buster of Colorado, United States Marshal. hunting-guide of Colonel Roosevelt, soldier of fortune, and Chief of Police, first of the Canal Zone and now of Porto Rico.

While the adventures of Rod Standish in Panama are, of course, fictitious, yet they are all

based on a foundation of fact. The attempt of "Big Bill" Bolger to steal the old French dredges, described in my book, is based on a similar incident of real life. The Big Slide at the Culebra Cut, which forms the basis of the closing chapters, is remembered by the veteran canal worker with a shudder. As a matter of fact there have been several of these "slides" in the past four years with as devastating a result as that pictured in my story.

I have tried to present to you the big facts of the Panama Canal and to give you a bird's-eye glimpse of the wonderful engineering feat which is to unite the world's two greatest oceans. If I have succeeded, and have at the same time won your sympathy for Rod Standish and the battles he was called upon to fight, I will be well repaid. Incidentally, I hope in the near future to give you a similar picture of other great industrial achievements and great business enterprises, which are making the events of peace more stirring in our country than many of the events of war.

Sincerely yours,

HUGH C. WEIR.

CONTENTS

		Page
I.	Lost in the Jungle	11
II.	Rod Receives Sudden Blow	23
III.	Another Turn of Misfortune's Wheel	35
IV.	The World Before Him ...	42
V.	A Chat about Panama and the Canal	53
VI.	A Rescue and Its Result ..	65
VII.	Rod Reaches Panama	84
VIII.	Worse and More of It	96
IX.	Adventure and a Surprise..	103
X.	Lieutenant Sterling's Secret Mission	115
XI.	A Council of War	129
XII.	Machete and Steam Shovel	140
XIII.	Into the Jungle	152
XIV.	Astonishing Development .	165
XV.	The Camp on the Chagres .	181
XVI.	Prisoners	194
XVII.	Flight Through the Night	209
XVIII.	The Noose Closes	225

Page

XIX. Uncle Sam, Storekeeper .. 241
XX. Battle of the Mountain .. 255
XXI. A Bird's-eye View of the Panama Canal 270
XXII. Rod Meets "57" 279
XXIII. Treachery 291
XXIV. The Big Slide at Culebra . 310
XXV. A Girl Intervenes 318

ILLUSTRATIONS

Page

Far up in the bow of the steamer *Frontispiece* 42

Advanced toward him with outstretched hands 111

They were almost upon the great mass of apparently jumbled rocks 177

"Standish?" repeated the Colonel thoughtfully, "I have heard that name often" 228

And noted the curious glances of the well-dressed women 285

With the Flag in Panama

CHAPTER I.

Lost In The Jungle

BOSTON was hungry, impatient, and in a hurry. In the early twilight, the workers of the great city were homeward bound, pouring from the yellow-lighted chasms of the subways for all the world like grain from a chute, filling the walks with a twisting, elbow-jostling stream, and even overflowing onto the pavements between the wheels of dodging motors and drays and the hoofs of stumbling horses as eager as their drivers for home and rest. From the streets came up a low, dull roar as though the city had been forced to wait for its supper and was growling out its impatience and displeasure.

Rod Standish's thoughtful face had been unusually grave during the brisk walk from the doors of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. It was not his habit to maintain a moody silence on any subject and for two blocks Jack Winters, his chum, had been watching him fur-

tively as he dug his fingers nervously under the strap handle of his books and puckered his lips into a whistle only to stop abruptly in the middle of a note and stare disconsolately at the hurrying scene around him. In short, he had all the symptoms of a boy with a disagreeable burden on his mind.

Jack coughed meaningly once or twice and dragged his feet heavily on the walk but the hints passed unnoticed. The other's thoughts might have been a thousand miles away. With a final glance of impatience, Jack drew a long breath and plunged into the heart of the problem without preamble.

"I say, Rod, why can't you tell a fellow?"

Rod turned his eyes toward his friend with a quick flush. "Well what?"

"That's just like you, Rod Standish! Go mooning along here for fifteen minutes and then when I ask you what the trouble is, act as though you are taken completely by surprise. All right then, don't tell me. I don't want to force myself into your affairs with a crow-bar!"

"Don't take it like that, old fellow! "I'm not much of a chap to talk about my worries, you know. I've always thought that people had enough of their own to stand!"

"I've always noticed that *you* were ready enough to help anybody else in trouble! What's

a friend for, Rod, if it is not to give a lifting hand now and then?"

Rod smiled faintly. "If every friend was like you, Jack, what a great place this old world would be! You're right. I ought not to go sulking about. And perhaps it will do me good to unburden my mind."

Jack Winters glanced up suddenly. "I say, Rod, it isn't money, is it? Because if it is, you know I've got a whole lot more than is good for me, and you're—"

"No, Jack, it isn't money—not exactly. Don't look so disappointed. I believe you'd pay my way through college yourself and take it as a favor if I'd let you, you walking mint! No, it's not money, Jack. It's, it's—my father!"

Jack Winters flushed in his turn. "Really, Rod, I didn't know it was that! I thought it was something concerning yourself. Maybe, you had better not tell me, then. I'm sorry if I—"

"No, Jack, I'll finish now. After all, you know almost as much about my father as I do. You met him when he was home a year ago, you remember, just before he left for South America. Jack, I'm afraid something has happened to him down there in the jungle!"

'You don't mean—"

"Yes, I'm afraid I do! I haven't heard from

him for more than two months now, and his last letter was written from the heart of the Columbian wilderness and taken back to the coast by a carrier. Things were going against him then. His surveying party had been held up for weeks by the wet season. They had struck a critical point in the route for the new railroad he is trying to build across Columbia, you know, and he said that the next six weeks would determine their success or failure. The expedition was caught in one of those South American swamps, and if they couldn't find a solid path across they would have to give up the line and go back. Poor old dad! He was staking everything on putting the road through! I can't understand it, Jack. Even if he has failed, I should have heard from him by this time!"

"Perhaps he has written, and the letter has miscarried?"

"I'd like to think that was the explanation, but even if that were the case, I should have had a second letter."

"Why don't you cable?"

"I'm going to if I don't hear by Saturday. But if he's stranded in the jungle, a cable won't find him any better than a letter. I haven't a single relative to go to for advice, you know. Father and I are absolutely alone!"

The boy's lip quivered in spite of himself.

"Sometimes I don't think it's right for me to be having a good time up here while he's going through all sorts of hard-ships down there in the tropics, building railroads and bridges and things to give me an education. And to think that now perhaps he has given his life for me! It's hard for another chap to look at things from my point of view, Jack. You have a house full of brothers and sisters, while except for the three or four weeks of the year that dad is here I have no one!"

In the dusk, Jack reached across and grasped his friend's hand silently. He had the rare gift of knowing when sympathy is felt most unspoken.

"Well, Rod," he said awkwardly as they paused before the entrance of the latter's boarding house, "you have one consolation, anyway."

"What's that?"

"You'll be through "Tech" in another two years and be a full fledged engineer yourself!"

Rod sighed. "You can't realize what an inspiration that is, Jack! Father is a 'Tech' man himself, you remember, and the fact that I'll have the same diploma he's got has been a big goal to me. Next to losing father my hardest blow would be to lose my chance of graduating!"

"You haven't lost either yet, Rod. And to tell the truth, I think you are alarming yourself

about nothing. If you don't get a letter by tomorrow, suppose I take the matter up at home? Perhaps my father can suggest a way of helping you that we haven't thought of. What do you say?"

"I'd be ungrateful to refuse the offer, Jack, and there may be some truth in what you suggest. But—"

"What?"

"I have had a curious feeling for a week that I'm going to hear some bad news!"

"Tut, tut, old fellow, that isn't a bit like you!"

"I know it isn't. That's the point!" Rod said gloomily. He hesitated a moment, and then with a sombre expression on his usually merry features he started slowly to climb the stairs. Jack Winters stared after his retreating figure with his hands thrust deep into his pockets.

"There goes the best chap in all Boston!" he muttered. "I'd give my next quarter's allowance if I could help him! If it wasn't for that starchy pride of his—"

He shook his head and strode away into the darkness with the sentence uncompleted.

Captain Robert Standish was a civil engineer, mining prospector, and soldier of fortune. He had led a railroad construction gang through the veldts of South Africa, the Andes of Peru, and the jungles of Nicaragua. He had built bridges

in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Brazil. He had prospected for gold in Mexico and Columbia. He had won his army rank in Venezuela in an insurrection that had deposed one president and put another in his place. He had gone for five days without food in an exploring expedition to the head waters of the Amazon. He had been condemned to death by the San Blas Indians and a year later had been almost killed by the Voodoo-worshippers of Jamaica. To use his own expression, his career could best be summarized in the abbreviation, "T. T."—translated "Tropical Tramp."

Once he had conquered his "wanderlust," married, bought a home among the elms of Cambridge, the University City across the Charles, and established an engineering office in Boston. The day that had brought him the birth of his son brought him also the death of his wife. Even Rod's babyish prattle had failed to lessen the blow of his loss. He was a man who did all things with the full force of a strong nature and he had given to his wife the one great devotion of his life. With her death, Captain Standish was in many ways a changed man. The wilderness offered forgetfulness of his grief, and he sold his home, placed the care and education of his son in the hands of his only brother, and plunged into the interior of Tehauntepec on a

surveying expedition for a new trans-continental railroad.

It was not until three years later that he returned home, and it was from this visit that Rod's first impressions of his father dated. From that time the boy had carried with him the picture of a tall, grave-featured man, who seldom smiled and whose face was as brown as a berry, and who always called him Rodman. It was from him that he first heard the name. Everyone else called him Rod.

Captain Standish came little to "the states" in the years that followed. Rod was ten years old when he saw him next and the occasion left a lasting impression of the stalwart soldier of fortune in the lad's memory.

The boy was trudging home from school when there was a burst of shouts and a frightened cry from the corner ahead, and he saw a rough-faced youth seize a slender, cripple-girl and wrest from her a plump, ruddy apple. Rod's eyes flashed with indignation at the bullying theft and the cowed attitude of the circle of lads that had witnessed it. The tormentor was at least two years older and two inches taller than he, but the boy sprang at his throat without an instant's hesitation. The surrounding spectators, emboldened by his leadership, cheered as the bully fell back and the apple rolled in the dust.

How Rod's impulsive attack would have ended is a question. The boy had an indistinct view of a hot, angry face before him and a pair of clenched fists waving dangerously near his nose, Then there came a quick, stern voice from the walk and a man's heavy hand fell on his collar and jerked the two apart. Rod looked into the flashing eyes of his father.

Captain Standish deposited his travel-worn valise on the curb. He had just come from the depot.

"This is a pretty spectacle!" He said sternly. "I have a mind to take a hand in this and give you both a trouncing. Why were you fighting, Rodman?"

"Please, sir, I couldn't help it!"

"Couldn't help it? Why?"

"He was stealing an apple from a lame girl, and I couldn't stand by and see that, you know!"

Captain Standish whirled on his heel, but the bully had taken advantage of the moment and slunk down a neighboring alley.

Father and son walked home in silence. They had nearly reached the gate when Captain Standish said abruptly, as the boy darted a half-eager, half-fearful glance up at him, "Rodman, you are old enough to begin to understand the ethics of a gentleman. There are only two reasons why a man should fight—for the honor of his country

and in defence of the weak. On all other occasions when he strikes a blow, he is either a bully or a coward—or both. Remember that!"

"Yes, sir." said Rod gravely. And this rule of his soldier-father had then and there been made one of the cardinal doctrines of his life.

In the next eight years Captain Standish paid half-a-dozen visits to his son. But from this time on, he corresponded whenever possible at monthly intervals and Rod did the same. Often the boy received envelopes plastered with strange seals and stamps and worn and soiled with long journeys across foreign seas, and once his father told him that in South America he had sent a native carrier three hundred miles on foot to bring back a packet of his letters.

The bond between the two unconsciously deepened in spite of their separation—perhaps because of it. During Captain Standish's rare visits home the couple spent days together in rambles about historic Concord and Lexington, in long rows on the Charles, or sailing along the North and South shores, Rod returning with a new appreciation of his broad-shouldered, brown-faced parent and a new stock of his adventure stories.

The youth's high school graduation was marked by an unexpected loss—the death of his uncle, with the exception of his father his only

relative. Captain Standish had come home for the graduation, but was forced to leave again almost immediately, having barely time to enter Rod at the Boston Technical University and to assist him in finding a new home near the college.

It was not strange that the boy's tastes should lie toward an engineering career. His father, however, had never encouraged him in his ambition, preferring that the choice of profession should be a matter of the lad's own making. Secretly he had always hoped that his son would follow in his foot-steps and during many a lonely vigil in the tropics he had drawn mental pictures of the youth working at his side. But he had resolutely refrained from tendering the suggestion. When the boy broached the subject and declared for his father's profession, Captain Standish felt a sense of the deepest gratification he had known for years.

During Rod's course at the Institute of Technology, his father had been home but once, and then only for a month. In many respects it had been the happiest month of the lad's life. The two spent a week of the period in the Maine woods, and under Captain Standish's guidance Rod had bagged his first moose. As father and son lounged about the ruddy glow of the camp fire in the tingling dusk of the October evenings, they had drawn enthusiastic plans for the for-

mer's next visit home which Captain Standish promised should be the longest he had ever made. He had even hinted at a hunting trip to the Rockies during the summer vacation.

Rod recalled the plan now with a pang as he climbed the stairs to his room. He had even written a letter a few weeks before, requesting permission for Jack Winters to accompany them. And now instead of the rousing welcome home, perhaps his father was lying in an unknown grave in the Columbian jungle!

Rod turned the knob of his door and stepped into his dimly lighted room. He paused on the threshold and peered ahead of him, trying to accustom his eyes to the gloom. The gas drop-light was just ahead. The boy dropped his books onto a chair and picked his way toward it, fumbling for a match.

As he did so, there was a quick step behind him, a heavy arm flung itself about his shoulders, and he was lifted squarely from his feet.

CHAPTER II.

Rod Receives A Sudden Blow

ROD'S first sensation was that of a sudden and overwhelming amazement. Then he made a desperate lunge forward in an effort to wrest himself from the grip of his assailant but his captor held him like a vise. He was powerless. Now he saw that it was a man who had seized him from the darkness—a man with muscles like steel. For a moment the youth was silent, panting. Who was this mysterious intruder that had stolen into his room? Again Rod threw himself forward but the encircling arms held him like a vise. He could not have been secured more closely had he been bound to a post.

A low, mocking laugh sounded at his shoulder. The boy's anger surged up in a hot wave at his helplessness.

"You've got me fast whoever you are!" he ground out suddenly. "But I don't see any joke about it!"

"I am sorry your sense of humor isn't farther

developed!" was the swift retort. "When one loses that essential—"

The sentence was not completed. With a sudden, swift wrench, Rod ducked downward and outward. He straightened to an upright position three feet away, but before his former captor could take a step toward him he sprang forward and threw his arms about his shoulders.

"Father!" he cried. "Father! Is it really you?"

A ringing laugh answered the question. "I thought you would know me even in the darkness, Rodman! You need a pair of eyes like I've developed in the jungle!"

For a moment Rod's voice left him. His father back safe and sound when he had pictured him dead or dying miles from civilization! It seemed too good to be true.

"I had given you up for lost, dad!"

"Lost! What do you mean?"

"I haven't heard a word from you for ten weeks. Why didn't you let me hear from you?"

"I did! You should have had at least three letters." Captain Standish struck a match and lighted the gas, with his brow knit in a puzzled frown.

"I paid heavily to see that those letters reached the mails, Rodman. You say that you haven't had one of them?"

"Not one! I was just on the point of cabling. I was almost desperate when I came home with Jack Winters tonight. Jack will surely be surprised when he finds you are back."

"I can imagine only one explanation, Rodman. My carriers must have deceived me and my letters were never mailed. Our party was more than two hundred miles from a settlement for over four months. But I endeavored to send my mail back regularly. When I didn't hear from you I knew enough about the South American postal system to take it for granted that your letters had probably been lost. Evidently my carriers must have been playing me false all around." Captain Standish dropped into the rocker by Rod's study table with a sigh.

"I was tempted to cable you before I sailed, but I knew that I would be home in two weeks and I wanted to surprise you. Of course I had no idea of your suspense!"

Rod leaned back against the stack of books at his elbow. He could hardly believe it possible that his father was smiling up at him there in the gas-light within three feet of his hand!

"I feel like pinching you, dad, to see if it is really you!"

"I assure you that you will find I am a pretty lively corpse!"

"When did you reach Boston?"

"I came over this morning from New York. Our steamer came out of quarantine at eight o'clock just in time for me to catch one of the early trains."

"Then you must have been here for a couple of hours while I have been grinding away at classes?"

"Well, the time didn't pass heavily, Rodman. I was rather enjoying the thought of your astonishment when you opened the door and found me here."

"And who wouldn't be surprised? There is one thing certain, dad!"

"What's that?"

"Columbia hasn't weakened those muscles of yours any!" the boy answered ruefully, rubbing his arm.

"Yes, I have no doubt that wrestling with the jungle for a year is a better physical developer than your gymnasiums," Captain Standish said with a smile.

Rod shifted his position so that he could gain a clearer view of his father's features. The fact was forcing itself upon him that his parent looked curiously worn and haggard.

"What about the railroad?" he asked abruptly. "Did you succeed?"

The youth fancied that his father drew a long breath before he answered the query. "I am

afraid, Rodman," he said slowly, "that the line is a failure! I guess the Columbian jungle isn't the place for steel rails and locomotives. It will take more dollars than it's worth to oust the parrots and the monkeys from their strong-holds. I put a year of the hardest work of my life into the line, and the failure has hit me rather hard. That's why I am here now—at least one of the reasons."

"Well, it's brought you home anyway!" Rod rejoined cheerily. "An hour ago I was afraid I would never see you again."

Captain Standish rose hastily to his feet and walked across to the window and back. "Now tell me about yourself, Rodman. Or wait—let's adjourn for supper, for your wandering parent is hungry, and I presume you will have no trouble in putting away a good meal, either!"

Rod darted a shrewd glance at his father as he put on his hat and turned toward the door. Somehow the youth fancied that he spoke in a tone of forced levity. At the restaurant table the boy found his eyes again and again studying the strange deep lines on his face. They had not been there when he had seen him last. Captain Standish had aged more in the past year than he had in the previous five.

Rod stopped abruptly in his account of the last "Tech" foot-ball game.

"Father, you've been working too hard!"

Captain Standish glanced across the table as though the words had startled him.

"Do I show it as plainly as that, Rodman?"

"You've got to promise me, dad, to take a long rest."

"I am afraid that is impossible!"

"Why?"

Captain Standish toyed nervously with his fork. "There is no use to try to disguise matters, Rodman. When we get back to your room, I will tell you all about my situation frankly."

For a moment father and son looked squarely into each other's eyes. Rod could not have told why he did it but he impulsively reached across and pressed his father's hand as they rose from their chairs.

Captain Standish paid the reckoning and they threaded their way in silence among the glistening tables to the street. Outside the early theatre throngs were beginning to fill the walks, and once or twice the youth nodded to an acquaintance who turned to look at the stalwart soldierly figure at his side. Captain Standish was a man to attract attention even in a crowd.

It was only a short distance to Tech Chambers where Rod roomed, but it seemed an almost endless period to the youth before they reached his room. Captain Standish was puffing nervously

at his cigar. He had not spoken half a dozen words during the walk.

He was the first to break the silence, however, as Rod drew the rocker up before the grate for him and closed the door.

"I once met a man in South America, Rodman, who had been condemned to death in an insurrection. It was in Venezuela. At the last moment when he was expecting the guard that was to lead him before the firing line he was pardoned. I have always remembered his account of that night, of how the thought of the ordeal that was to come with the morning hovered before him like a ghastly dream. He could not shut it out, sleeping or waking. It seemed as though he could not muster courage to face it without breaking out in a frenzy. And then perhaps an hour before day-break his fear vanished. He had made up his mind that he would conquer his cowardice and meet his fate like a man, and the strength which the resolve gave him overcame all of his restlessness and weakness. When the guards came, instead of a broken-down wretch, they found a prisoner who was as calm and steady as they were. I am in a great deal the same position tonight, Rodman."

"You?" the youth cried in amazement.

"Three weeks ago I was sleeping in a swamp

and eating decayed food and plastering my face with yellow mud to keep away the mosquitoes. When I reached Boston this afternoon I told myself that I would rather face the swamp again than the task now before me!"

"But surely, dad, you give me credit with enough backbone—"

Captain Standish held up his hand as he rose to his feet and stood facing his son.

"You must prepare yourself for a shock, Rodman, my boy—a very great shock, I fear. I won't mince matters. You must leave Tech!"

Rod stared at his father for a moment as though he were dazed. Leave Tech! The words rang through his ears like a harsh echo. In all of the suspense of the past fifteen minutes he had never imagined this.

Lose the diploma that had been the great ambition of his life! Lose the engineering career he had pictured in such rosy dreams!

Captain Standish leaned forward with his hand on the back of his chair as though he would read the boy's inmost thoughts.

Then suddenly Rod caught sight of his father's haggard features, and the remembrance of what the announcement must have cost him swept over the youth like a wave of cold water. He saw now that his graduation had been as much a dream of his father's life as of his own—

and he had been thinking only of himself! Rod tried to force a smile to his face.

"Don't take it so hard, dad! Better chaps than I have had to leave college! It's, it's—a matter of money, isn't it?"

"Yes, Rodman, it's a matter of money!" Captain Standish said slowly. "You may remember my mining venture in Peru three years ago. It called for a heavy cash expenditure just before I sailed for South America last year, and I was forced to use practically all I had. The crash came hardly three months later."

Captain Standish paused wearily. "I am an engineer, not a financier, Rodman. I deferred writing you at the time, for I hoped to recuperate from the new railroad in Columbia. But I was disappointed again, and I was forced to return home with my savings of nearly twenty years gone. I am a poor man tonight, my son, poorer than I care to think!"

Rod dropped into the chair he had drawn up on the other side of the table. Now that the blow had come he was surprised at his own calmness. Only when he thought of Jack Winters' merry face did he wince.

"Of course, I will have to leave Tech at once?"

"I am afraid so. I had hoped to give you another year even if you couldn't graduate, but I fear it will be impossible."

Rod hesitated. "And have you thought of what I am to do? I realize that I must go to work, of course."

"I have two suggestions, Rodman," Captain Standish said thoughtfully. "I can find you a clerical position in one of the large New York commission stores, the owner of which is a personal friend of mine. I think in time you could go high under his direction. Although a wealthy man, he, himself, started as a poor clerk and I am confident he would do everything in his power to advance your interests."

"And what is your other suggestion, father?"

"In view of your engineering bent, I have thought of the Panama Canal, Rodman. I dare say I can secure you a berth on the Isthmus very readily."

"Panama!" the boy repeated musingly. "Panama—or New York. You surely offer me two extremes, father!"

"Yes, my boy, it is desk—or jungle. It is for you to decide."

"And what are your own plans? What do you intend to do?"

"I intend to go to the Canal, myself," Captain Standish smiled. "An old friend has already promised me an engineering position there."

Rod sprang to his feet. "Knowing that, do

you think I could hesitate a moment in my choice. Why, I'd go to the end of the world with you! Panama, it is, father! That's settled. When do we sail?"

"Unfortunately, we must leave as soon as possible. I hope to get away within the next ten days—two weeks at the outside."

Rod's face clouded. He had not expected to leave so soon. He had considered his departure from college as something vague, of the future. The realization that he must face it at once brought his loss before him with new emphasis.

"Will you be ready, Rodman?"

The youth clenched his hands as he fought back his emotion.

"I will be ready when you are, sir!" he said.

Captain Standish picked up his suit case as he spoke. "I have made arrangements for a room across the hall. If you are up before I am in the morning—" He paused abruptly at the door and then walked back with his tall figure curiously stooped. "I doubt if I slept three hours any night on the trip up, Rodman. The thought of what I was coming home to say to you was almost more than I could bear. You will never know the days and nights in Columbia when it seemed as though I *must* conquer the jungle, that I could never give up and go back to wreck your hopes!"

Captain Standish was not a demonstrative man. Years of solitude had increased his habit of reserve, but the next moment father and son found themselves locked in each others' arms, with the tears trickling down the cheeks of both.

When Rod recovered himself he was alone. The youth slowly took off his coat and collar and mechanically reached for his trigonometry. He had turned the pages to the next day's lesson before he remembered that he would not be there to hear it. He closed the book with a strange sense of unreality, and walked across to the window where he stood staring moodily out at the stars in the slate-gray sky overhead. He noticed vaguely that where the yellow arc of the corner street lamp fell across the asphalt, the shade of pavement and sky almost matched. He found himself wondering why he should notice a trivial fact like this at such a moment.

What a change the past twenty-four hours had brought in his life!

Little did he realize that the next twenty-four hours were to bring an even greater change.

CHAPTER III.

Another Turn of Misfortune's Wheel.

ROD found his father up before him the next morning, but they separated when they arose from the breakfast table. The youth made his way toward Technology, where he planned to close up as soon as possible the details connected with his departure, while Captain Standish commenced an extended circle of business errands.

In the brisk morning air, Rod began to view the change in his life with greater optimism. For the first time since its suggestion, he considered the prospect at Panama with a real pleasure. After all, would not the practical experience at the Canal go a long way to off-set his loss at "Tech?"

His father had often said that a civil engineer could never be made by college text books. And then he need not have to give up the latter entirely even if he were forced to leave the class room. He recalled the story of a former Harvard student who had been obliged to leave college in his Freshman year and who had mas-

tered nearly the whole of the university course in the evenings at home after a hard day's work on the New Haven and Hartford Railroad.

It was not until Rod came into view of the group of buildings composing "Tech" that the thought of what he was to leave behind him struck him with something of its first shock. The same queer lump he had felt the night before came into his throat again. But he was not given long to indulge his emotions.

An impatient voice hailed him from the rear and the next moment Jack Winters clapped him vigorously on the shoulder.

"Hello, Rod! I've been trying to attract your attention for a block. Have you heard from your father yet?"

"He's here!"

"What's that? You don't mean in Boston?"

"I found him in my room waiting for me when I left you last night. He came in yesterday afternoon."

"That's the best news I've heard for a month, Rod!" Jack cried heartily. "You don't know how glad I am for your sake, old fellow! But why haven't you heard from him?"

"Father thinks his carriers deceived him and that his letters were never mailed. Nearly all the time that I was knocking my heels together

in suspense, he imagined that I was hearing from him regularly." Rod hesitated. Should he tell Jack of the change in his life—that he was leaving Tech? He felt a curious embarrassment in doing so, with the remembrance of Jack's big-hearted nature. He knew instinctively what his friend's first offer would be, and he shrank from the pain of refusing it. Dear, generous old Jack!

Rod was spared a decision. A door was flung open before them and Professor Mertens, one of the mathematical assistants, beckoned to the lad with a glance of relief. Rod obeyed his summons in a mild surprise.

"You are wanted in Dr. Burrough's office at once, Mr. Standish."

"Me?" the boy repeated. "What's wrong?"

"I fancy it is an urgent telephone call. I have been searching for you nearly ten minutes."

Dr. Burroughs, the white-haired, bent-shouldered dean who had presided over the destinies of the university for more than a quarter of a century, was pacing nervously up and down the floor of his office when Rod opened the door. He came forward with outstretched hand.

"What is it, sir?" the boy asked.

Dr. Burroughs darted a shrwed, searching glance at him before he replied. "I have always looked on you as a sturdy, self-reliant young

man, Mr. Standish, one who would do honor to himself and to his college. I have had the good fortune also of knowing your father both in recent years and in the days when he was a student. I am confident that coming from such stock, you are not going to be found wanting when dark days come into your life!"

Rod sprang forward with a mute question on his lips. Dr. Burroughs turned his head abruptly away.

"My father! Is it my father?" the boy cried hoarsely.

Dr. Burrough's kindly eyes turned again to his face as though they would help him bear the shock of the words that were to come. "He has been very seriously injured in an automobile accident, my lad!"

Rod staggered back against the table. The room seemed to whirl about his eyes. Then he was conscious of a glass of water being held to his lips and a firm voice bidding him drink. The brief swallow that he forced himself to take, steadied him.

Dr. Burroughs was giving a low, quick order to an assistant when he turned. "I dislike to hurry you away, Mr. Standish," he said gently. "But under the circumstances I feel that it would be cruelty not to do so. I have called a taxicab to take you to the Hospital."

"Then my father is—"

"Dying!" finished the dean gravely. "It is best that you should know the truth, my boy. Captain Standish cannot live half an hour!"

Afterwards, Rod recalled the descent to the curb, the swift whirl to the great hospital, and the meeting with the white-jacketed attendant who was awaiting him in the front corridor as incidents of a hideous nightmare. He saw the figures about him and heard their voices like a person in a daze. He knew that the attendant took his arm and hurried him to an elevator, and that they alighted at a long, rubber-carpeted hall somewhere above.

It was not until a door at the farther end was opened, and on the rumpled bed under the window, he saw the drawn face of his father that the mist cleared.

Captain Standish recognized him with a faint smile. "I knew that you would come in time, Rodman!"

The lad sprang across the room and bent over the bed. "Tell me, dad, that it isn't—"

Captain Standish shook his head weakly. "It would not be a kindness to deceive either one of us, Rodman. You must face the truth like a man!"

Rod stood gazing down at the white-faced figure of his father, with his teeth biting into

his lip until the blood came. Then the horror of it all swept over him, and the thought seized him of throwing himself across the bed and keeping Death away by the sheer force of his own strength. He *could* not let his father die!

Captain Standish semed to read his thoughts. "It's no use, Rodman. The doctors have already done a miracle."

"It seems odd, doesn't it," he continued with a suggestion of his old humor, "that after running the gauntlet of the jungle for twenty years, I should be run down on a city street?"

"Who was the man that did it?" Rod burst out hoarsely.

Captain Standish gave a sudden gasp of pain, and the attending physician stepped quickly to his side and held a glass to his gray lips.

"It was no one's fault, my boy. The accident could not have been prevented. Bend closer, Rodman. I dictated a short note just before you came in, to Captain Evans of Panama. You will find him at Colon. Take it to him when I am gone. He will do for you what I will not be able to."

The dying man held up his hand and let it fall. It was only by a great effort that he kept his eyes fixed on the youth above him.

"My money is with the note. Take it, and—God bless you!"

Rod stooped still closer. He could not believe that the life had fled from those dear eyes on the pillow. The physician took his arm and gently forced him aside.

"It is all over! You can do no good now, my lad!"

Rod stumbled from the room into the long, rubber-carpeted hall again. The physician still held his arm and was saying something in a low, sympathetic voice that he could not catch. By an effort Rod roused himself to what he was saying.

"This afternoon will be time enough, Mr. Standish, to let us know your arrangements for the body."

Rod nodded, and stepped through the door onto the veranda. The sharp, bracing air rallied him. He looked about him like a visitor to a new country. There was a sense of strangeness even in the familiar stream of traffic before him. A wagon rumbled past him, and two girls tripped by on the walk, laughing. He stared after them with a vague shock. The world was moving exactly as it had been an hour before, as though there was no such thing as—death.

And now he was alone in it all! *Alone!*

He walked down the steps repeating the thought mechanically as though he could not quite grasp it.

CHAPTER IV.

The World Before Him.

FAR up in the bow of the steamer, "Prinz Eitel Frederick," southward bound from new York, a youth was leaning over the rail. His eyes were fixed on a circling flock of gulls skimming above the choppy, slate gray waves as easily as a boy coasting down an icy hill. The wind was whipping across the deck at an eighteen-miles-an-hour clip, and his hair was rumpled about his face like a football player's in a bad scrimmage. But he made no move to seek a shelter. On the contrary, he seemed to be thoroughly enjoying his exposed position and drank in the crisp, salt air with long, deep breaths of satisfaction. He did not even think it necessary to put on the gray checked cap that he had stuffed into the pocket of his overcoat.

As a matter of fact, Rod Standish *was* enjoying the tingling Atlantic breeze. The corner in the bow had been his favorite position during the three days of the voyage. The sharp wind, with its sea odors, helped him to think—and no one realized better than he that he had some serious thinking to do.

The events of the past ten days unrolled themselves before him like the unreal, fantastic happenings of a dream. At times, he fancied that he would awake with a jerk to find himself back in his old room at Boston, with nothing more important on his mind than the next day's classes. And then the ocean wind, lashing across the waves, would strike him in the face and force him back to the grim realization that he was an orphan—alone, with the world before him, and the last prop gone from him forever.

When Rod Standish saw his father's casket lowered into the little plot of ground in the Mount Auburn Cemetery, and turned away in the drizzling rain for the weary drive back to his room, he hadn't given a thought to the question of finances. He had taken it for granted that the contents of the little leather bag that the hospital attendants had given him with his father's clothes would be amply sufficient for his needs.

With him in the cab were Jack Winters and his father who had insisted on accompanying him to the cemetery. It was the latter who first directed the youth's attention to the need of an immediate inventory of his capital. Leaning toward the boy, Mr. Winters rested his hand sympathetically on his knee as he said kindly, "I wish you would tell me frankly, Rod, just how you are situated financially."

The boy turned his eyes from a study of the wet gray pavement outside. "I am afraid I don't know, sir."

"Don't know?"

"I mean that I have not examined the bag where father kept his money. From what he said, I fancied there was quite a little sum there."

Mr. Winters looked grave. "Where is the bag?"

"I locked it in a drawer in my room."

"If you don't mind, I will go up with you when we get back and we will see just how you stand."

The three went to Rod's apartment in silence. Even light-hearted Jack found few words to say, while Mr. Winters seemed instinctively to appreciate Rod's desire not to talk.

The youth walked over to his table and unlocked and opened the drawer.

"Here is the bag, sir. I wish you would count the money, if you will."

Mr. Winters emptied the little stream of green-backs and gold pieces onto the table and rapidly calculated the total.

"Is this all, Rod?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I am afraid there is not as much here as you expected."

"How much does it make?" the boy asked.

"Just three hundred and twenty-five dollars. Perhaps you have already paid the funeral expenses?"

Rod shook his head. "I told the undertaker to send his bill tomorrow. He said it would be in the neighborhood of two hundred dollars."

Mr. Winters pursed his lips. "Then that will leave only a little over a hundred dollars. Have you made any plans for yourself yet?"

"I think I should leave for Panama as soon as possible."

"My dear boy, do you think that is wise under the circumstances? Panama is a long way off and you will be among complete strangers. Why not stay here where at least you will have friends?"

"I think it was father's wish that I go to the Canal. I have a letter from him to a close friend on the Isthmus which ought to secure me employment at once."

Mr. Winters slowly emptied the slender stock of money back into the bag.

"I am a rich man, Rod, and I would like to help you. It would be a real pleasure for me to assist you. Jack tells me that you are in a fair way to take the first honors of your class. Why not finish your course, and then if you wish to go to the Canal later you will have a civil engineer's degree back of you?"

There was a twinkle in Mr. Winters' eyes as he spoke. Rod gazed at him in bewilderment.

"How can I finish my college course without funds?"

"I think we will have no trouble in arranging that. I am willing to take a chance on your honesty. I will advance the money to complete your education, and you can repay me after you have graduated!"

With a shout Jack sprang from his seat in the corner and seized his friend's arm.

"Hurrah, old fellow! We'll take our diplomas together after all!"

Rod gazed from Jack to his father with a sudden understanding.

"Jack Winters, this is your doing!"

"Well, I'll admit father and I talked it over. But you didn't need much urging, did you, dad?"

Mr. Winters was studying the mingled emotions on Rod's face while pretending to be examining the odd workmanship on Captain Standish's bag.

"What do you say, my boy? Is it a bargain?"

Rod walked over to the window without replying and stood looking down into the street. Mr. Winters motioned Jack to keep his seat as the latter made a move to follow him. It was fully five minutes before Rod turned.

"I thank you, Mr. Winters," he said huskily. "I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I would be made of stone if I didn't appreciate your kindness and that of Jack—but I can't accept it!"

"Can't accept it, Rod!" Jack burst out in dismay. "And why won't Your Royal Highness condescend to—"

"Don't, old man! You don't understand. It isn't because I don't appreciate your generosity, and all that it would mean to me, but honestly I think I have thought it all out and I don't feel that under the circumstances it would be right for me to take your offer. You see father had strict standards on the subject of borrowing. I dare say he could have gotten the money easily enough for me to finish school if he had felt it was the best thing to do. Even if I were situated where there was some definite chance of paying it back, I don't want to start my life on a line which I know he wouldn't approve if he were here. And I know you wouldn't want to have me."

Mr. Winters reached over and seized the boy's hand. "Good for you! Spoken like a man! Not another word on the subject, Jack. If you are ever placed in the same position, you can pay no greater tribute to your father's memory. Put on your hat, Rodman. You are coming out to

the house for dinner. No, I won't hear of a refusal. You are under my orders now!"

Rod was to hear more of Mr. Winters' generosity, however. The next afternoon when the youth called at the office of the undertaker, who had charge of his father's funeral, he met with a surprise.

"There is no bill, Mr. Standish," the proprietor of the establishment said when the boy asked for his account. "My services were paid for this morning. You friend, Mr. Winters, gave me his check for a complete settlement, and told me to send you the receipt. My clerk was about to mail it to you."

Rod's eyes closed tightly and he found it hard work to fight back his emotion.

"All right, Mr. Gallagher. I will take the receipt now, if you have it ready."

The lad left the office with two resolves in his mind. This settled it. He would leave for Panama at once but before going he would return to Mr. Winters the money he had expended. If he stayed in Boston longer he saw that Jack and his father would force their generosity on him in spite of himself. If he did not want to meet their kindness with positive rudeness, there was only one course to follow. He must leave—and leave without delay.

Entering the Boston post office he made his

way to the money order window. When he left it, he had lessened the contents of his father's money bag by nearly two thirds and had tucked into his pocket a slip of paper which the United States government would redeem at the order of Mr. Winters for the sum of one hundred and ninety dollars, the amount of the undertaker's bill.

Leaving the post-office, the youth made his way to the agency of the Hamburg American Steamship Company.

"When does the next boat sail for Panama?" he asked the clerk behind the desk.

The youth turned to a large red placard at his elbow.

"That will be the 'Prinz Eitel Frederick.' It leaves the New York dock at ten a. m., the day after tomorrow—Saturday."

"And what will the passage cost me?"

"You mean first cabin?"

The lad calculated swiftly. "How much will that be?"

"Seventy-five dollars to Colon. That is the Atlantic port of Panama, you know."

"You give me a ticket," the boy said abruptly, bringing his father's bag into view again.

"By the way, can you tell me what time I can get a train to New York tonight?"

"Twelve o'clock. That will reach New York

at seven in the morning. If you wish to reserve a berth, you can use our telephone," the clerk added obligingly.

Rod hesitated a moment. Then he walked across to the instrument and called up South Station. The monotonous voice of the man in the ticket office at the other end of the wire, saying mechanically, "All right, I'll hold number seven for Standish," came to him with something of a shock. He had taken the final plunge. In less than eight hours he would be embarked on the long journey that would end—how?

When he returned to his room, Rod sat down at his desk and pulled his pad and pen toward him. For over ten minutes, however, he drummed absently on the blotter without writing a stroke. The last step in his double resolve was the hardest of all. Finally with an exclamation of impatience, he dipped the pen into the ink and covered a closely filled page before he paused. Then he sat back with a sigh and read what he had written.

"My dear Mr. Winters and Jack—

"This is to tell you that I am leaving for Panama tonight. You will probably be surprised at my decision, and to tell the truth, I am surprised myself. You will guess my rea-

son, and I may as well confess it. I am running away from you. There, I've said it! When I found that you had paid the undertaker, I realized that if I gave you another opportunity you would find a way to force me to accept your money in spite of all I could do. Much as it hurts me to do so, I feel that I ought not to give you the opportunity. It would only make it harder for both of us. I enclose a money order for the amount of the bill that you paid for me. I wish I could tell you how much I thank you. But I am afraid that is impossible. I can never forget your kindness, and will always think of you and good old Jack as the two friends in my life that have meant most to me. If I seem abrupt or unappreciative, forgive me. That is all I can ask.

"Yours gratefully,
Rodman Standish."

And this was how Rod left for Panama.

The hum of the great city's traffic was strangely stilled and the flickering street lamps seemed only to emphasize the murky blackness of the November night as the youth, from the misty window of the Pullman, watched the outskirts of Boston drop from view. He sighed softly as he turned away. When would he see it all again? When and where would he get

his next view of Jack Winters' cheery face? Little did he realize the exciting event through which he was destined to pass before he was to answer these questions.

CHAPTER V.

A Chat About Panama And The Canal

A VOICE suddenly interrupted Rod's musings in the bow of the "Eitel Frederick." It was a pleasant, kindly voice in spite of the slow, measured tones of the speaker. Rod turned to find at his elbow an elderly, slightly stoop-shouldered man, with very precisely trimmed white whiskers. He was smiling as he held out his hand.

"You seem to have a difficult problem on your mind, my boy."

"I was thinking, Judge," the lad answered as he made room for him beside the rail. "And the wind helps to clear my thoughts."

Judge Arnold darted a shrewd glance at the youth's sober features. During the three days on ship-board, he had had several long conversations with the boy, and had found himself much attracted by the lad's reserved, straightforward bearing. This fact was increased when he learned that the boy was bound for the Panama Canal. Judge Arnold was one of the American legal advisers at the Canal Zone and

was returning to his duties after an extended vacation in the United States.

"Is there anything in which I can help you?" he asked after a moment's silence.

Rod shook his head. "I am afraid not, sir."

"Panama is larger than most Americans are apt to think," the Judge said pleasantly. "I have lived there so long that perhaps I could give you some information that would be of assistance to you. Do you expect to be there a great while?"

Rod hesitated. "I hope to obtain work there."

"Indeed! May I ask what kind?"

"I shall try to get an engineering berth of some sort. You see I have been a student at the 'Boston Tech,' and in another two years would have had my diploma."

The Judge glanced at him in surprise. "Why don't you finish your engineering course?" A sudden flush swept the boy's face. Judge Arnold reached over and put his arm sympathetically about his shoulders.

"There, I'm afraid I have asked something that is none of my business! Forgive me!"

"Oh, it isn't that, sir!" Rod said hastily. "And really I am obliged for your interest. You see I have just lost my father, and, and—there wasn't enough money left for me to finish at the university. That is all."

Judge Arnold looked thoughtfully out at the waves for a moment without answering. There was a strange moisture in his eyes when he turned.

"You take me back to my own youth. That was exactly my situation forty years ago. I was just half through Harvard when my father died suddenly, and I was thrown on my own resources. There ought to be a peculiar bond of sympathy between us, my lad."

"What did you do?" Rod asked as the Judge paused.

"Oh, I left college, rolled up my sleeves, and went into a country law office!" The Judge turned the conversation abruptly. "May I ask what suggested the Panama Canal to you?"

"My father had friends there," Rod answered, "and I have a letter to one of them—Captain Gray, perhaps you know him?—who, I am sure, will help me."

Judge Arnold nodded thoughtfully. "No doubt! You will find him at Colon, I think. If you need another friend, I wish you would let me know."

"Thank you!" the youth said gratefully. "By the way, you referred to Panama as a large country. I was always under the impression that it is what we call 'a tea-cup republic.' "

"Viewed by the standard of the United States,

perhaps it is," the Judge answered laughing. "As a matter of fact, however, it has an area of 32,800 square miles. While this is only about one-eighth the size of our own state of Texas, yet I think you will admit that it represents a good deal of ground."

"I believe I have read some place that only about one-half of Panama is settled. Is that true?"

"To be accurate, less than a third of the country is settled, and only a little more than one-half has ever been fully explored. Incredible as it may seem, there are still large sections that have never known the foot of a white man!"

"Why is that?"

"Principally because they are almost impassable jungle. A half mile from the Canal, the foliage is so thick and heavy that progress can only be made with the aid of machete. I think I can safely say that the jungles of Panama are the densest on the American continent!"

"What is the population of the country?"

"Three hundred and sixty thousand—only a little more than half of the population of the city of Boston!"

Rod gazed at a flock of gulls at the right of the boat reflectively. They were engaged in a merry battle for a stream of scraps that had just been emptied from the ship's galley.

"I have heard you often refer to the 'Canal Zone,' Judge. What do you mean by that?"

"That is the American section of the republic of Panama. It is a strip ten miles wide and fifty miles long, which we obtained from the Panamanian government by treaty. Panama wouldn't sell it to us, but our possession is practically as complete as though we owned it. It is governed by American laws and protected by American guns. The Panamanian government has no jurisdiction inside its bounds—and we have no jurisdiction outside."

"And, of course, that is where the Canal is being constructed?"

"Yes. Panama is only about fifty miles wide at this point. In fact, this is the narrowest section of the western continent. If you had the Twentieth Century Limited down there you could travel from the Atlantic ocean to the Pacific in less than an hour's time!"

"But isn't there a railroad in Panama?"

"Oh, yes. It is called the Panama Railroad, and it is one of the most curious lines of traffic in existence. It was the first railroad ever constructed across the American continent!"

"How long ago was that?"

"A little more than fifty years. To be exact, the line was completed on the 27th day of January, 1855. It was in the height of the Cali-

fornia gold fever. Before this time, the western pioneers who didn't care to take the long journey from St. Louis to the gold fields by wagon train, had to go down around Cape Horn and come up the west coast of South America, a four months journey. The Panama wilderness was so forbidding that there were few who had the hardihood to try to cross it. The obstacles of the men who built the Panama railroad in fact are almost unbelievable. There are those who say that it cost a life for every tie. Of course this is exaggerated, but there is no doubt that hundreds of lives were lost before the line was finally completed!"

"You are not telling Mr. Standish that story about the coolies of the Panama Railroad, are you, father?"

Rod turned as a girl's merry voice broke into the conversation. A young woman of seventeen, with brown eyes that seemed to be always laughing, and a mass of brown hair, on which a blue Tam'o'Shanter was tilted rakishly, was swinging along the deck on the arm of a tall, young man with a long, gray ulster and a thin, little brown moustache. His most noticeable feature was an eye-glass which he managed to keep in its awkward position in spite of the sweep of the wind.

The young woman was Edith Arnold, the

Judge's only daughter. Her escort was Reginald Wingrave, an attache of the English consular office in the city of Panama.

"What is that about the coolies?" Rod asked as the two joined the group.

"It is a rather curious tale," Judge Arnold began, "but it gives one an excellent impression of Panama in the old days. It was extremely difficult for the contractors of the Panama Railroad to obtain workmen, and the fever made such ravages in their ranks that often the progress of the line was held up while the construction camps waited for new consignments of men. At last some one hit on the idea of importing Chinese coolies. Consignments of nearly a thousand men were sent over to the Isthmus, and the Chinese laborers were put to work in the jungle.

"But the experiment did not succeed. The coolies were not used to the hardships of the wilderness. After a few weeks of working ten hours a day, waist deep in the red mud and slimy water, and bunking at night in the pelting rain, they grew discouraged and clamored to go back home. One night the situation reached a climax and the coolies broke camp in a body.

"The next morning, a gruesome scene met the eyes of the Americans. Over a hundred of the

Chinese had deliberately hanged themselves by their queues from the branches of the trees. They were quite dead. They had preferred wholesale suicide to the battle with the jungle!

"But this was not all. Scores of others reached the Atlantic, and walking out onto the shore, sat cross-legged in the sand until the tide washed over them. In the course of the week, nearly five hundred of the laborers committed suicide either by drowning or hanging, and it was necessary to hurry the others back to China to save their lives!"

"Quite a story!" drawled Wingrave, "but after all, they were only coolies. It would have been cheaper to let the whole of the beggars kill themselves!"

Rod whirled on the speaker with flashing eyes.

"I don't agree with you, Mr. Wingrave! A man is a man regardless of the color of his skin."

Edith Arnold darted a glance of approval at Rod, and the young Englishman scowled.

"If there had been the proper overseer down there with a long enough whip, he could have kept those coolies in order!" Wingrave growled.

"Americans don't do their work with slaves!" Rod returned.

"Really! I was always under the impression that slaves were legitimate property in the

United States until 1863—and unless I am badly mistaken the Panama Railroad was built nearly ten years before that date!"

The youth flushed and Judge Arnold seeing the strained nature of the argument, skilfully came to the rescue.

"Mr. Standish, I think, infers that the American nation has never accomplished any great project by the lash and the slave. For that matter, no other nation has ever done so. I am confident that history will bear me out in this statement." The Judge turned to his daughter. "Don't you think this position is becoming too exposed for you, Edith? I was about to return to the cabin. Won't you join me?"

The girl nodded to the two young men and took her father's arm. Wingrave hesitated a moment and then stalked sullenly in their wake, leaving Rod alone.

When the passengers of the "Eitel Frederick" appeared on deck the next morning, it was, with the realization that the next day would bring them to their first port. This was the picturesque city of Kingston, the capital of Jamaica, where the steamer was scheduled to make a two-days stop. From here, Colon, the Atlantic seaport of Panama and the end of the voyage, was thirty-six hours distant. Jamaica is British territory. When Rod went ashore at Kingston, for

the first time he would be beyond the domain of the stars and stripes.

The crisp chill in the air, which had made an overcoat comfortable, had disappeared. It had been succeeded by a pleasant warmth that gave promise of rapidly increasing before the day was over, and many of the ladies had already donned light dresses. The "Eitel Frederick" had plainly passed the outer edge of the tropics. Even the color of the water had changed. The slate-gray waves had given place to a light blue almost matching the cloudless sky overhead.

Judge Arnold was enjoying an early morning promenade before breakfast when Rod stepped out onto the deck. The Judge gave the youth a hearty greeting as he paused.

"I always think of Kingston as the city of earthquakes and pirates," he said musingly as Rod fell into step at his side.

"Why is that?" the youth asked curiously.

"Hardly a week passes that there isn't a tremor of the earth in Jamaica," the Judge answered, "and sometimes there are several 'quakes' in the course of a single day. Most of them are not serious, of course, although two or three of the most disastrous earthquakes in history have been recorded in this vicinity. In 1907 nearly seven hundred persons were killed at Kingston and most of the public buildings

of the city wrecked. Indeed, a good deal of the wreckage still litters the streets."

"But why isn't it cleared away?"

The Judge smiled. "The Jamaican native doesn't believe in any more work than is absolutely necessary to his scanty idea of comfort. It is almost impossible to obtain laborers on the island who will stick to their task longer than a week at a time. An old resident of Kingston told me that a year after the earthquake they were still finding bodies under the debris! In an American city, the victims would have all been recovered in a few days."

"You referred to Kingston as the city of pirates," Rod said. "What do you mean by that?"

"It was one of the headquarters of the old buccaneers of the Spanish Main. Sir Henry Morgan spent a good share of his life there, and in fact fitted out most of his pillaging expeditions in Kingston Harbor. In those days, the city was the rendezvous for all of the desperate characters of the Indies."

"But why didn't the English government interfere?"

"Because Morgan seldom molested an English vessel, I imagine. He made most of his attacks on the rich galleons of Spain. Once he broke over the line, though, and sacked a

British frigate, and as a result was sent to London in irons. But he hid enough money to pay his ransom and buy back the favor of the government, and returned to Kingston with the rank of commander-in-chief of the Jamaica navy! When he died, he was lieutenant governor of the island." Judge Arnold paused as the steward came up behind them with the last call for breakfast.

"We'll have to hurry if we want anything to eat," he said laughing. "Pirates are an interesting subject, but I think I would prefer a good steak just now!"

CHAPTER VI.

A Rescue And Its Result

THE "Eitel Frederick" bore into Kingston Harbor in the first streaks of dawn the next day. The sun rises early in the tropics. Rod found it already peeping over the blue water when he clambered out of his berth a little after four o'clock. For a few moments, he stood peering through the port hole at the green fringe of shore, rising out of the waves like the bold, swift strokes of an artist sketching in the background of a picture before the eyes of an audience. The youth had never fancied that the sight of trees could be so welcome. He rapidly dressed and stepped out onto the deck.

Early as it was, he found Judge Arnold and Edith already leaning over the rail, watching the swiftly approaching shore-line. The girl waved her hand merrily.

"It is just like a toy village springing up out of the water! Come over here, Mr. Standish. The view from this side is magnificent."

"Kingston, to my mind, possesses one of the most picturesque harbors in the world," the

Judge said as the youth joined them. "Your comparison to a toy village is good, Edith. That red brick fort over at the point there with the green trees behind it and the yellow sand before it bears out the simile excellently."

"It all seems so calm and peaceful that you wouldn't think there could ever be anything like tragedy here!" Rod said musingly.

The Judge leaned over the rail and pointed to two blackened spars thrusting themselves out of the sluggishly moving water. "There is your answer to that remark, my boy."

"What are they, father?" Edith asked curiously.

"Can't you see? They are the ends of a ship's masts!"

"You don't mean to say there is a vessel under the water there!"

"Exactly. It is one of the examples of the awful power of the earthquake. The boat was lying at anchor when the 'quake swept the city, and it was torn from its moorings and then forced back under the waves as though a giant sledge-hammer had crushed it!"

The girl shuddered and turned her eyes away.

"Let's change the conversation to a pleasanter subject," the Judge suggested as he put his arm about Edith's shoulders. "Kingston contains one of the most beautiful botanical gardens in

the world. You can promise yourself a rare treat when we visit it."

"What is it called?" Rod asked.

"Hope Garden. It is filled with one of the most complete collections of tropical plants on the western continent. The British government spends a great deal of money and labor in maintaining it."

The "Eitel Frederick" was approaching within hailing distance of the dock when the breakfast call sounded. By this time, the greater share of passengers were out on deck, leaning over the rail, and drinking in the beauties of the early tropical morning. Few heeded the steward's whistle. The rapidly nearing waterfront was more attractive than the dining salon.

The dock was filling with a crowd of yellow-skinned, thick-lipped Jamaican negroes in flapping Panama hats with the brim twisted up in front and down behind, cotton trousers rolled to the knees, and dirty red bandanna handkerchiefs, knotted about their necks instead of collars. All were bare-footed, and the bottoms of their feet were as flat as the planks of the dock. Most of them carried baskets of fruit or trinkets for sale, ranging all the way from coral beads to yams and funny little native cakes. Some of them had even made capital out of the city's disaster, and had gathered bits of

twisted nails and melted glass from the ruins of the earthquake to sell to the curious tourists.

In the front ranks of the crowd were a motley gathering of urchins with wide-opened eyes and mouths, and tousled wooly pates for all the world like a feather duster. Some of them were entirely naked save for a knotted cloth about their waists. There was a reason for this. As the huge steamer drew nearer, they dived laughing and splashing into the yellow water at its side, and then rolling on their backs like so many porpoises, shouted shrill, pigeon-English sentences up at the staring passengers on the ship's rail. A shower of pennies rewarded them. Hardly had the coins struck the waves when the surface of the water cleared as by magic. The youngsters had dived toward the bottom like a cloud of wriggling eels in search of the glistening coppers. And they found them, too. With the coins tightly clutched between their teeth, they darted back to the surface, treading water and waving their hands for more.

Rod and the Arnolds were interested spectators of the scene as they lingered on the way to breakfast.

"I should think they would be afraid of sharks!" Rod laughed as the Judge tossed a handful of coppers among the bobbing black heads on the water.

"You don't mean to say that there are sharks in this water?" Edith cried.

"I imagine it would be difficult to find a tropical harbor where that wasn't true," her father answered. "There is an old saying in the West Indies, however, that a shark will never touch a negro! The boys in the water certainly seem to prove it. If one of us were to attempt the same feat, I don't know whether he would be safe or not."

"Well, I for one wouldn't do it for a thousand dollars," said Edith decidedly.

"Nor I, either, badly as I need the money!" Rod added as they turned into the dining saloon.

They were both destined to recall their words with startling emphasis before the "Eitel Frederick" left Kingston harbor.

When Rod emerged from the breakfast table, he found that the steamer had docked, and a number of the passengers were already assembled at the gang plank, eager for the first trip ashore. As he took his station on the outskirts of the crowd, the Arnolds appeared in company with Reginald Wingrave. The young English attache was resplendent in a new white duck suit, white shoes, and Panama hat. He was twirling a light bamboo cane jauntily as he assisted Edith down the stairs. Rod drew back

as he thought ruefully of his own well-worn suit in comparison. Edith caught sight of him, however, and called merrily across to him.

"We are going for a tour of the city. Don't you want to go with us?"

"Really, I don't see how we can manage it, Miss Arnold!" Wingrave put in abruptly. "With the driver, there is only just room enough in one carriage for our party!"

Rod flushed. "I am afraid I couldn't accept, anyway," he said, addressing the girl. "I only intend to take a short stroll."

Edith tapped the deck impatiently with the tip of her parasol, and Wingrave looked relieved. The next moment, however, the voice of Judge Arnold broke into the conversation.

"Tut, tut, Mr. Standish! I won't hear of a refusal. I am well enough acquainted with Kingston to know that it is as easy to secure a carriage for five persons as it is for four. Come on, Wingrave! You and I will secure the vehicle, and we'll leave Standish to bring Edith!"

Wingrave's shoulders stiffened, and a scowl, which he took no trouble to hide, formed on his face, but there was no help for it. The Judge drew his arm jovially under his, and hurried him toward the gang plank. Rod was left behind with Edith in a variety of emotions. When the lad piloted his companion to the narrow,

dusty road winding up from the wharf, Wingrave and the Judge were waiting at the side of a rickety, Jamaican carriage, hitched to a team of sleepily nodding mules, as dilapidated as the vehicle.

Edith drew back with a laugh. "Is this the best we can do, father?"

"Oh, you'll get used to this, daughter, in the West Indies. Dirt is so common in Kingston that no one notices it!"

"That white duck suit of yours will be simply ruined, Mr. Wingrave!" he said teasingly.

The young Englishman shrugged his shoulders. "It doesn't matter. I have a dozen more in my trunks, if it is!" he returned in a superior tone. "If I had known your friend, Mr. Standish, wasn't equipped for the tropics, I could have loaned or given him one!"

The remark and the tone brought another hot flush to Rod's face in spite of the fact that he turned toward the driver as though he hadn't heard the words. He was relieved when the Judge clambered to the front seat and called to him to take the place at his side. The driver settled down on a stool before them, and clicked to the mules. The team raised their ears, tossed their heads together as though indulging in a whispered debate as to whether or not to proceed, and then apparently reaching a favorable

decision, hesitatingly placed their front feet forward and then hind feet and began a yawning ascent of the driveway.

For two of the party, the drive proved a distinct and pleasing novelty. Wingrave and the Judge had visited Kingston on several occasions, both before and after the earthquake and were familar with its show-places. To Edith and Rod, however, the ride brought a constant succession of points of interest, whether in the market place with its riot of colors and strange fruits and copper-faced women kneeling over yellow triangles of bananas; or in the quaint old-fashioned squares, with their uneven cobblestones and shadowy, squatty buildings and picturesque bazaars suggesting mediaeval Spain; or in the imposing architecture of the government edifices, towering above the remainder of the city as though every stone recognized its superiority. The ruins of the earthquake were on every hand. Often the debris of wrecked buildings extended a third across the street, and it was necessary for the carriage to make a detour to avoid the litter. In an American city, a hurrying, jostling wrecking crew would have been at work, and its labor would have been continued without a pause until the pavements were cleaned. Kingston, however, was making only a half-hearted effort to

remove the debris, and to the amazement of the tourists most of this was being done by the women! Rod counted eighteen native women at work on one corner, carrying heavy baskets of stone and brick from the ruins of the bank, the loads balanced on their heads, as they trudged stolidly through the broiling sun, while groups of lounging men smoked on the curb and watched them!

In the next block, the carriage passed a long, low, brick building, with its second story shattered into a huge heap of broken bricks and mortar at one side.

"There is another vivid evidence of the power of the earthquake," said Judge Arnold. "That building is one of the newspaper offices of Kingston. When the disaster burst over the city, the editor was dictating an important item of late news to one of the linotype operators in the composing room."

"And what did he do?" asked Rod with interest.

"He kept on until he finished the article, and then looked out of the window to see what damage had been done!"

"He must have been an American!" said the youth enthusiastically.

"I believe he was!" responded the Judge smiling.

Rod was perhaps more interested in the curious types of people before him than in the buildings. Shuffling negroes stumbled lazily across the street, scarcely deigning to dodge the carriage. Shrill-voiced native beggars kept pace with the mules, pleading for a copper. Shrewd-eyed Japanese merchants, always in spotless duck suits as though they were the insignia of their trade, beckoned to them from the doors of their tiny bazaars, or perhaps enticingly held up a vase or a souvenir for their inspection. Jamaican girls with glaring red sashes and a half a dozen jingling bracelets on their arms, tripped merrily past. Trim, blue-uniformed native policemen in white helmets, most of them hardly larger than a good-sized boy, stalked down the street, generally three or four abreast as though relying on numbers to emphasize the majesty of the law. Barefooted hucksters, in heavy, rumbling carts, drove clattering, over the cobble-stones. Occasionally a private carriage galloped by, with a liveried coachman in front and expensively dressed ladies from the wealthy Jamaican families in the rear, fanning themselves languidly under their sun-shades. Now and then, a British soldier, with his uniform buttoned to the throat in spite of the heat, and his face tanned to the color of a negro, swaggered down the walk. It was all so different

from home! Rod drew a long breath. Almost for the first time, he realized how far he was from Boston Common!

It was with quite a shock that the party saw it was past lunch time when they returned to the steamer. The drive had consumed the entire morning.

When Rod entered his state room after the meal, he intended spending the afternoon on deck, watching the process of unloading. For a moment he stood gazing out of the porthole at the blue water lapping lazily against the steamer's side and the edge of the weather-scarred wharf in the distance. The rattle of chains and pulleys echoed harshly from above as though they were growling out a continuous protest against the weight of the barrels and kegs they were swinging up from the ship's hold. The voice of a native dock-hand, singing at his work, floated out with strange distinctness from the line of ware-houses. Once there was a sudden, angry burst of shouts and the crash of a falling cask as a rope slipped. Rod opened his door and ran up on deck. A circle of perspiring workmen, coatless and shirtless, were tugging at a huge crate of barbed wire that had fallen from the steamer's deck, splintering the rail, and tearing a jagged hole in the planks of the dock. An English over-

seer with a very dirty Panama hat, a very angry face, and a very red moustache, was giving a volley of hoarse, impatient orders from the head of an upturned keg.

This much of the scene flashed before Rod when a sharp, piercing scream of terror rang out suddenly from the stern of the ship. As the youth whirled about in the direction from which it had come, he realized with swift wonder that the voice was that of a girl. Rod saw that he was alone. Most of the passengers had retired to their state rooms after lunch for a siesta, and the officers and crew were either busy with the task of unloading, or had obtained shore-leave. His section of the deck seemed deserted. The scream had come from the stern and the boy listened intently for a repetition as he broke into a run, but there was none. As he was rounding the edge of the main passenger saloon, a door at his elbow was flung open and the blue-uniformed figure of the purser almost collided with him.

"What is wrong?" Rod panted.

The purser darted a backward glance at the questioner, but did not slacken his steps. "Girl overboard!" he jerked out.

"Where?"

The officer shook his head as though he had no breath to answer, and the next moment the

two were darting across the end of the deck. Rod darted a quick glance at the blue-green waters of the harbor, but there was no sign of a struggling figure visible. The purser came to a pause at the rail, scanning the surface eagerly.

"Look sharp!" he cried to Rod. "I caught a glimpse of her just as she fell. She was leaning over the rail, and the crash of that crate of wire when it struck the dock must have made her lose her balance. She can't be more than three or four yards away. You have younger eyes than I have. Can't you make her out? Watch for her head when it comes up. Her dress is almost certain to keep her afloat if she doesn't lose her wits. Sing out the instant you catch a ripple in the water!"

Rod strained his eyes out over the waves. The sun partially blinded him, and it was not until he shaded his face with his hand that he was able to see the water clearly. Then he uttered a low cry. Over at the left, a head had suddenly bobbed into view. The purser saw it almost at the same instant. The officer uttered a cheery shout of encouragement, and drawing back his arm, tossed a life preserver toward the sinking figure. It had scarcely touched the water, however, when Rod threw off his coat and hat and sprang to the top of the rail. The boy had

made a startling discovery. The struggling girl in the water was Edith Arnold! And even as he recognized her, he saw that she was too exhausted to reach the shelter of the bobbing life-belt.

The purser seized the boy's arm excitedly. "What are you going to do?"

Rod shook off his hand. "I am going to save that girl!" he said with a note of quiet determination. Again locating Edith's position, he balanced himself for an instant and leaped boldly out from the steamer's side. As he disappeared from the rail, there was a hurried step behind him, and a gray-haired man rushed frantically across the deck. It was Judge Arnold. The purser recognized him as the Judge sprang toward the rail, and divining the relationship between him and the drowning girl, caught his shoulder with a quick, firm grasp of sympathy. As the two peered over the side, Rod shot to the surface and struck out swiftly toward the spot where he had last located Edith's sinking form. The girl was not visible now. There was no sign of her position except a rapidly dwindling circle of ripples. Rod drew a long breath and dived. He knew the secret of keeping his eyes open under water. The circumstances of his first lesson flashed vividly before the lad in spite of the tension of the moment

as he darted a swift glance ahead through the light green depths of the harbor. There was not the slightest clue to guide him in his search. He started to swim forward with slow, cautious strokes. Had he missed Edith's position? Had he dived too far to the side and passed her? He turned, as he asked himself the questions. His eyes were burning now so that he could hardly force them open. His breath was coming in short, smothered grasps as though a knife were slashing into his chest. He shot desperately upward toward the fresh air, with a roaring like the crash of a sledge-hammer in his ears. His bold declaration that he would save the girl had been a farce! Even then her lifeless body was probably sinking toward the bottom of the harbor, forever beyond the reach of help.

The first breath of the tingling salt air, as he flashed to the surface, Rod never forgot. It was a thrill of new life. He lowered his feet gently and stood treading water as he glanced swiftly over the surface. As he did so, he could hardly repress a cry. At his elbow, so near as almost to brush his arm, was Edith Arnold's white, set face, with her long brown hair wrapped about her neck and shoulders in a great wet mass. Rod's first impression as his arm closed about her body was that she was dead.

But he was given no opportunity for speculation.

By this time, at least a score of persons were crowded by the steamer's rail, and his first intimation that there were observers of the rescue came in a sudden, confused burst of cheers. Rod glanced upward. Half-blinded as he was by the water, the figures above him seemed as vague and far away as though they were on the edge of a skyscraper and he in the street below. The black hulk of the steamer suddenly oppressed him by its very size. At the foot of the huge mass of iron and wood, towering out of the waves, he seemed so hopelessly puny that for an instant his steadiness almost deserted him. The thought brought him back to the question as to whether he should try to make the steamer or the dock with his burden. A voice from the ship answered it for him. As his eyes became more used to the glare of the sun, Rod recognized the features of Judge Arnold at the railing.

"We are lowering a boat for you! Can you keep afloat?"

Rod attempted an answer and was startled to find that his throat was so parched it was impossible to raise his voice above a whisper. Judge Arnold stepped back, and re-appeared with a life preserver. His aim was good. The belt splashed into the water not three feet from

the boy's shoulders. It was not until Rod slipped it under his arms that he realized how weak he was growing. He peered down at Edith's face as he tried clumsily to brush the tangled mass of hair back from her eyes and make her position more comfortable. The girl had not moved once since he had found her.

Another burst of shouts from the steamer brought Rod's eyes again to the ship. He judged that the crew had lowered a boat, but from his position it was for the moment hidden from him. He tried to raise himself farther out of the water. The effect overbalanced him, and he fell backward. For an instant, he fancied he was sinking again.

Then a strong hand clutched his collar, a cheery voice sounded in his ear, and a hard, wooden surface rubbed against has shoulders.

The events of the next ten minutes were never quite clear to Rod Standish. He had a confused remembrance of being carried to the dock with Edith Arnold, and thence across the gang plank to the deck above; of a staring crowd that persisted in making a noise and trying to shut off the air; and of a dishevelled, white-haired man with tears streaming from his eyes and a trembling voice which the boy couldn't in the least understand. The black-whiskered ship's surgeon was bending over Edith's motion-

less form and working her arms up and down like the handle of a pump. Rod was conscious of a thumping headache and a desire to be alone. Some one took his arm and asked him if he could walk. He struggled to his feet and touched the doctor on the shoulder. The surgeon understood his question before he asked it.

"Don't worry about her, my boy! You had something less than half a minute to spare."

"You mean that Miss Arnold is safe?"

"I mean that she has grazed death so closely that had you been thirty seconds later, you would have been too late."

Rod took the friendly arm extended to him—he did not know whose it was—and stumbled toward his state-room. He was suddenly aware that his garments were very wet, and that water dripped in a rivulet on the deck as he walked.

The man who was helping him was increased by another at his other arm with one of the deck stewards in front of the trio with the key to the state-room. As the strange group reached the door, Rod suddenly tore himself from the friendly support, and sprang back with a hoarse, startled cry. His face was blanched to such a pallor that his companions sprang toward him in alarm. The boy motioned them wildly aside as he thrust his hands into first one pocket and then another.

It was gone! His father's wallet had slipped from his pocket during his struggle in the water. And it contained all of the money he possessed in the world!

The scanty funds, with which he was to commence life in a new land, were lying at the bottom of Kingston Harbor!

CHAPTER VII.

Rod Reaches Panama

WHEN Rod Standish changed finally into dry clothes and reappeared on the deck of the "Eitel Frederick," sober second thought had failed to suggest to his aching brain any ray of hope in the situation before him. His father's wallet was lost irretrievably. There was no compromising with this fact. And with it was gone the meager supply of cash that alone remained to him when he boarded the steamer in New York Harbor.

Rod carefully emptied his pockets, but his most systematic search brought to light just eighty-five cents in loose coins. Fifteen cents less than one dollar! And this was all that lay between him and beggary in a strange land, unless his father's letter procured him immediate employment.

The thought of the letter suggested another question of so uncomfortable a nature that the youth darted back to his state-room and snatched up his discarded coat. He felt hurriedly through its inner pocket and drew out a handful of

papers. It was not until he ran through them and recognized in one his father's familiar handwriting that he breathed freely. His letter of introduction at least was safe!

Rod found that Judge Arnold and Edith were still in their cabins when he returned to the deck. The bustle and confusion of unloading were still continuing. The thrilling incident of the early afternoon had not altered the routine of the vessel in the slightest. Rod had vaguely expected to find the atmosphere of the deck changed, perhaps because he felt such a curious sense of unreality, himself. The only suggestion left of his adventure, however, was in the staring glances of a group of passengers as he passed, and a variety of audible comments from two pretty girls which caused him to quicken his steps in confusion.

The purser was leaning over the rail, staring out over the harbor.

"Can you tell me how deep the water is at this point?" Rod asked, as he joined him.

"Are you wondering how long it would have taken you and Miss Arnold to have struck bottom?" the officer queried with a grin. "The harbor on this side has a depth of something over seventy feet, I believe."

"How deep are the native divers able to go?" Rod continued.

"I think the record is about twenty-five feet. Why?"

"Then there would be absolutely no chance of one of them recovering an object on the bed of the harbor?"

Not unless you drained the water out first!" the purser said emphatically. You would need an expert with modern diving apparatus for your purpose. Have you lost anything?"

Rod hesitated. "Oh, my curiosity was aroused, that's all!" he returned, parrying the question. "I had no idea the water was so deep!" And he turned away, with the glimmer of hope which had suddenly flashed before him, effectually shattered. To employ a diver to search the harbor would cost a sum four or five times as great as the contents of the lost wallet!

Rod jingled the coins in his pocket grimly. There were three of them—a half dollar, a quarter, and a dime. Eighty-five cents! He wondered vaguely how many times this sum had been tossed to the little colored divers that morning by the passengers of the "Eitel Frederick," just for the pleasure of seeing them splash through the water!

That evening at dinner, the lad received another shock. Judge Arnold entered the dining room alone, and paused at his table to say in a low tone; "I am sorry to tell you that the

doctor gives me a very bad report of my daughter."

"I thought she was recovering nicely?" Rod cried in dismay.

"So she seemed to be at first. But she has been far from well for several weeks, and the shock and exposure of this afternoon have been too much for her. In fact, she is hovering on the verge of a serious siege of fever."

The next morning brought an even more alarming report from Edith's stateroom. Her condition had grown materially worse during the night and when the Judge met Rod shortly after breakfast it was with the grave-faced announcement that she had surrendered to the germs of typhoid, and even though she worsted the disease, she would not be able to walk for weeks.

Rod spent a long and tedious day. Even the bustle of disembarking when the "Eitel Frederick" pushed out from the Kingston wharf late in the afternoon failed to arouse his interest. Ordinarily he would have been keenly entertained by the strange sights on the dock, and the spectacle of the three hundred Jamaican laborers, bound for the Panama Canal, that the steamer took on board as steerage passengers. But he was too filled with the problem of his finances—or the lack of them—to give more than a passing attention to his surroundings. Should

he apply to Judge Arnold for aid? To Rod's high-strung nature, this seemed too much like asking payment for saving Edith's life. He could not cable back to Mr. Winters for help. Even if he used every cent of his slender supply of cash, he could not raise a quarter of the amount of the tolls. And he could not cable collect. He had already ascertained this. It was an ugly problem, and the longer he pondered it, the gloomier and more hopeless of solution it became.

Edith Arnold was no better the next day. When Rod saw the Judge late in the afternoon, she was wildly delirious, and the ship's surgeon seriously doubted whether she would be in a condition to be moved from the steamer when they reached Colon.

His fears were realized. When the "Eitel Frederick" bore into the harbor the next morning, it was only too plain that an attempt to carry the girl either to her home or to the American hospital would end disastrously. There was only one course open to Judge Arnold in his predicament—to leave his daughter on the boat. The "Eitel Frederick" sailed from Colon during the evening for a week's trip down the coast, touching at the Panamanian port again on her return, on her way back to "the States." The Judge therefore, made his plans to remain on

the steamer, trusting that by careful nursing it would be possible to take Edith ashore at the end of the week.

Rod was one of the first of the group of passengers crowded about the rails as the boat entered the Colon harbor. The coast of Panama was extending across the horizon in a low fringe of sleepily nodding palm trees at the foot of a jagged line of very misty hills, whose dull, shadowy forms could only be seen here and there like the shoulders of a tall man in a fog. The harbor was a huge bowl of gray water set in an uneven rim of muddy land. Beyond it, the squat, dreary outlines of the town were jumbled together in a shapeless, confused mass. Rod's first impression of Panama was confined to a dirty, dilapidated wharf, a straggling row of palm trees, wearily shaking their branches like a drowsy man stretching his arms, and a line of long, weather-beaten ware-houses seeming to rise sheer from the water, with huge sign in black and white paint sprawling across their front.

"Are you disappointed?"

Rod turned to find the smiling face of the ship's surgeon at his side.

"Most of the new arrivals at Panama expect a glittering panorama," continued Dr. Henderson, "and the reality falls considerably short of their expectations."

"I rather imagined there would be some evidence of the Canal work," said Rod.

"No, indeed!" the doctor rejoined quickly. "As a matter of fact, you will have to go several miles inland before you will see the Canal-builders actually at work. That is why the average American tourist, who thinks he ought to see the dirt flying even before his ship docks, is disappointed. Colon is Panamanian territory. The United States has no jurisdiction in the town."

"I thought Colon was the Atlantic outlet of the Canal Zone?" said Rod in surprise.

"That is easily explained. The Americans are located in a suburb, that is called Cristobal. It is not over ten minutes' walk from the dock, and is really a part of the town. But so far as its manners and customs are concerned, it might be a thousand miles away. Colon is a sleepy mud-hole, thoroughly characteristic of the indolence of the tropics. Cristobal is a wide-awake American military post, spick and span, and full of bustle and energy. You could find no greater contrast, if you searched the world over, than there is between these next-door neighbors."

Dr. Henderson extended his arm toward one of the shadowy hills on the right.

"That is the cemetery of Colon. There is a

popular report that says the number of corpses in the town exceeds the living population. And I should not be surprised if this were true. Until two or three years ago, when the Americans in self-preservation were forced to clean up the place, it was little more than a disease-breeding swamp. I shudder to think of the ravages of yellow fever alone—'Yellow Jack," we call it down here."

"Is Colon the old sea-port of Panama?" asked Rod. "It seems to me that I have read that in the old days of the Spanish Main, Porto Bello, farther down the coast, was used as the outlet to the Atlantic."

"You are right. That was in the hey-day of Panama's glory when Spain ruled the country and the treasure of the Incas was transported overland on mule-back from the Pacific to be carried to Europe. In those days, the city of Panama was the metropolis of Central America, and Porto Bello was a far busier city than Colon has ever been."

"Wasn't that just after Pizarro's conquest of Peru?" Rod queried, more interested in the discussion of the romantic past than in a survey of the scenes of the present.

"Yes. For the fifty years or so following Pizarro's expedition across the Andes, Panama occupied a pinnacle of fame and fortune which

she has never equalled since, even with the prestige of the Canal. Millions of dollars worth of treasure passed through the country, and Panama was by all odds the center of activity of Central America."

"Why was the Atlantic port moved from Porto Bello to Colon?"

"Porto Bello was destroyed by the buccaneers, and either through superstition or because it was thought that Colon could be better defended in case of attack, the new city was moved northward, and Porto Bello was practically abandoned."

Dr. Henderson broke off suddenly as he caught sight of the quarantine officer boarding the ship.

"If you want a thrilling romance, read the history of sixteenth and seventeenth century Panama, when the traffic of the Spanish Main was at its height. Most people think of Panama only in connection with the Canal. To my mind, its past is far more interesting than its present."

Rod had already packed his baggage. After the examination of the health officer had been completed, there was nothing farther to keep him on board. The majority of the passengers were already dressed for the shore.

Rod was about to descend to the Arnold's

state-room to make a final inquiry as to Edith's condition when he almost collided with Reginald Wingrave and the Judge, rounding the deck. The young English attache was attired in a jaunty blue serge suit and white cap, and was plainly ready to land the moment the dock was reached. Judge Arnold caught Rod's arm as the youth passed.

"I will see you later, Mr. Wingrave. I want a few moments' conversation with Mr. Standish."

Wingrave looked anything but pleased at the interruption, but gave Rod a careless nod, and left the two alone.

The Judge drew the lad across to a deserted corner of the deck, and placed his arm suddenly about his shoulders. The action brought a quick flush to Rod's face.

"Do you realize, Standish, that but for your heroism the other day what my position would be this morning?"

Rod held up a quick, protesting hand.

"Don't, sir!"

"I wouldn't be human, my boy, if I didn't want to thank you as you deserve to be thanked. With Edith's illness, I have not had a chance to do so before. You are young, and a stranger in Panama. You will need friends, perhaps more than you realize now. I am not a rich man, but

it will be a pleasure if you will let me help you. Can you suggest a way?"

Rod hesitated. If Judge Arnold could only realize how much he *did* need his help! Circumstances could not have introduced the subject of the lost wallet more favorably. Since the Judge had asked it, he determined to present his dilemma frankly and ask for his assistance. Surely he would not refuse it.

"It is very good of you," he began awkwardly. "I hardly know how to thank you, in my turn." He reddened again as he shifted his position. He had never tried to borrow money before in his life. It was harder than he had expected. "To tell the truth, Judge," he blurted out, "you can assist me if——"

The hoarse voice of a steward broke suddenly into the sentence.

"Has any one seen Judge Arnold?" As the two whirled around, the uniformed negro recognized the Judge's tall figure.

"Please, sir, the doctor wants you at once in Miss Arnold's stateroom!"

The Judge's face whitened. Without a word he sprang toward the door of the passenger salon, and disappeared within. Rod started to follow him and then drew back.

"Is Miss Arnold worse?" he asked the steward.

The man looked at him in surprise.

"I don't think so, sir. Dr. Henderson merely wanted the Judge to consult with the quarantine physician, who is getting ready to leave the ship. I didn't mean to alarm you." And he walked away, blissfully ignorant of the blow which his sudden appearance had been to the grave-faced youth, staring gloomily into the water.

Rod slowly retraced his steps to his state-room. He seemed destined to fight his battle alone, after all. The transition from his newly awakened hope of assistance to his former doubt and uncertainty was such that for a moment he was tempted to rail at fate. Then the native grit of the Standishes came to his aid, and he resolutely picked up his suit case, asked the porter to follow with his steamer-trunk, and started toward the gang-plank.

Ten minutes later, he was on Panamanian soil, with the three solitary coins in his pocket jingling mockingly. Rod glanced at the porter, fumbled the aforesaid coins doubtfully, and then hurriedly tossed the quarter to the man in payment. It was an absolutely small tip, and the porter scowled as though he were tempted to refuse it, but Rod gave him no chance. Quickening his pace, he strode out into the street without a glance behind him.

CHAPTER VIII.

Worse and More of It.

ROD had not the slightest idea of the path he was taking. He only knew that he was headed toward the business part of the town. The earth under his feet again felt good. He was conscious of a desire to walk, to walk fast, with his chest expanded. The laggard sun had thrust its way through the clouds, and was pouring a cheery glow through the mist of the hills and down into the muddy puddles of the narrow, ragged street. It was a morning to inspire the most sluggish. And the pace Rod was maintaining, with head and shoulders thrown back and lungs breathing full and deep, is the surest cure that has yet been discovered for pessimism. Almost unconsciously the lad's eyes brightened, his cheeks flushed, and he began to view the future with something of his old doggedness of spirit.

Panama at last! The land of steam shovels and dynamite, tarantulas and alligators!

Rod slackened his steps, and began to consider both his destination and his surroundings. His first step, of course, was to find Captain Gray,

and deliver his father's note. The Captain was stationed at Cristobal, and Rod imagined that once across the line into American territory, it would be a comparatively easy matter to locate his home. His course, after he had delivered the note, depended upon Captain Gray. Unless his father had greatly erred, Rod was confident that the Captain would not fail him in his crisis. Surely it would not be difficult to secure him employment in a project as huge as the Panama Canal. Such is the elasticity of youth that in spite of his recent discouragement Rod began to whistle. The sound startled him, for he had dropped into one of the favorite airs of the Boston "Tech." He stopped abruptly to find a black-haired Panamanian girl, with a wooden platter of little molasses cakes for sale, smiling at him curiously. She held her stock out to him temptingly, but Rod shook his head.

"That is a pretty tune, Senor," she said in English that made the boy stare in surprise. "I have never heard it before."

"I don't wonder," answered Rod laughing. "That is an American college song."

"You Americans are a funny people," the girl said thoughtfully, with her black eyes fixed admiringly on the youth's well-knit figure as he moved away. "You will be bringing your colleges down to the jungle next!"

As Rod glanced over his shoulder, a battered sign on the corner told him that he was on Front Street, the principal thoroughfare of Colon—and as he was to discover later, the only one at all worthy of the dignity of a street. And it was a straggling, dejected looking street, seemingly beginning nowhere and ending nowhere. Its buildings were confined mostly on one side, while the other side extended in a gradual sweep down to the gray surf of the Atlantic, with only a line of discolored, creaking freight cars between the curb and the ocean. The buildings for the most part were little more than sheds, long, low, rickety structures, with shutters instead of windows. These opened into the walk and were raised and lowered by means of a pulley, serving the double purpose of admitting such stray beams of light as cared to enter, and allowing the proprietor a means of dealing with customers on the sidewalk without troubling them to go inside for their purchases.

Rod noted curiously that the majority of the merchants were Japanese, and later he found that this was true of the city of Panama also. A perpetually smiling little Jap, hardly reaching to the youth's shoulder, although he was probably double his age, sought to attract him with a gaudy string of native beads. Next door, a curious array of native skins was offered for sale,

ranging from the pink and green hides of young alligators—strangely delicate in their shades in spite of the clumsiness of the animal—to the tawny fur of the mountain tiger. In a stuffy little store on the corner, a chattering monkey and a squawking parrot vied with one another to attract his attention, while the proprietor, a gesticulatory Panamanian with a yellow face and rings in his ears, offered to sell them both to him for five dollars, "American money."

A brisk five-minutes walk changed the scene as sharply and abruptly as a new film in a moving picture machine. Rod felt tempted to rub his eyes to make sure he was awake. The dilapidated store buildings, the Japanese merchants, the native skins and birds, the parrots and monkeys had disappeared. Even the dreary view of the ocean and the rumbling freight cars had gone. Instead, he was gazing down a trim, neatly graded American street, with a curb as spick and span as though it had been newly scrubbed, and pretty green grass plots on the edges. And beyond, on either side was a row of square, white houses, with wide verandas, and nodding flowers along the rails. It was as though the lad had been suddenly whisked back home to one of the villages along the New England seashore. Had an American flag been unfurled before him, the scene would have been complete.

Rod knew without inquiry that he had stepped across the Cristobal line—that he was again in the domain of Uncle Sam.

The lad paused undecidedly in the middle of the block. Where would he find Captain Gray? A stiffly erect young man, in a khaki suit and leggings, evidently an orderly, turned out of the house at his left and surveyed him curiously as he passed. Rod called after him, seeking a guide in his quandary. The young man paused and jerked his head over his shoulder. By a curious coincidence, Captain Gray lived at the end of the same block.

Rod ran up the steps of the house, and pushed the bell. He had reached the end of his quest at last! His hand mechanically reached toward his breast pocket to assure himself that his note was still there. He half drew the envelope out as he stepped back, awaiting a response to his ring.

He was raising his finger to the bell a second time when there was a belated step in the hall and a maid turned the handle of the door.

"I would like to see Captain Gray, please," Rod said, stepping forward. "I have a letter for him."

"Captain Gray left this morning on a three-weeks' trip to Columbia," the girl answered, staring at the effect of her words. For a moment the youth stood gazing at her in dismay.

"Left this morning for Columbia, did you say?" Rod gasped finally.

"Are you ill?" the maid asked kindly.

The lad recovered himself with an effort. "No, not exactly." He tried to smile, but he was conscious that the effort was something of a failure. "I have a message which I am very anxious to deliver to the Captain as soon as possible. You don't think there is any chance that he may be back under three weeks, do you?"

"I'm afraid not. Indeed, he may be gone even longer than that," the girl said sympathetically. And then she brightened. "If your message relates to government affairs——"

Rod shook his head. "No, it is a personal matter. No one but Captain Gray will do." His brain was whirling. He wanted to get away somewhere and think. When would his misfortunes end? Was there an end?

He turned listlessly and mechanically raised his cap as he started down the steps.

"Would you like the Captain's Columbia address?" the maid asked.

Rod hesitated. "No, I will have to wait until he returns."

On the walk, he looked back. The girl was still watching him. No doubt his behavior *had* been peculiar, he admitted ruefully. How could it have been otherwise? He had thought he was

prepared to stand everything—to meet every blow of adversity. But this was too much!

First the abandonment of his college course, then the death of his father, then the loss of his parent's scanty savings. And now he was denied even the help of a friend who was to find him employment!! Was ever a boy down and out more effectually—in a strange land twenty-five hundred miles from home? And it was only two weeks ago that he had been sauntering to his classes at "Tech" without a care in the world.

Rod's bitter musings were broken suddenly and sharply. His wandering steps had taken him beyond Cristobal back into Colon. From the narrow street before him a hoarse burst of cries and the lash of an angry whip rang out.

As Rod came to a pause and digested the details of the astonishing scene ahead, even his own predicament was swept from his thoughts.

CHAPTER IX.

An Adventure and a Surprise.

IT was indeed a startling scene.

A man and a horse that had lost their heads had brought about a situation that was rapidly verging toward a tragedy.

The man was a Panamanian cab driver, whose sallow face had grown almost white with terror. On the rough, uneven pavement, his mule-team was plunging wildly back and forth, dashing his abandoned vehicle from curb to curb so viciously that every instant it seemed as though it would be splintered into a mass of wreckage. This was the first detail of the impending disaster that struck Rod's eyes.

The second detail was a huge bay horse, hardly a quarter of a block away, that was plunging toward the swaying cab and the frightened mule-team at a pace showing clearly that it was completely beyond control. In its saddle was a very much flushed young man in the undress uniform of a lieutenant of the United States army, whose toes were digging sharply into the stirrups and whose every muscle was tense and

rigid in the desperate effort to check his steed's maddened flight. Even in that instant Rod was conscious of a thrill of admiration at his steadiness. There was not the slightest hint of fear in his bearing, although he must have known that he was facing death, with the odds frightfully against him.

The issue was plainly a matter of seconds. Even the crowd on the walk was pressing instinctively back from the curb as though fearing personal injury when the crash came. There was no effort at a helping hand, apparently there was no thought that there could be a helping hand. Rod saw only a row of stolid faces whose owners were divided between fear and curiosity. The cowardly coachman who had abandoned his team, was huddling back against a corner bazaar, with his knees shaking and his eyes rolling. Evidently he had been attempting to lash his horse beyond the danger-zone when they had rebelled in a panic, and he had fled.

Rod saw the whole panorama with the swiftness and vividness of a lightning flash. It could not have been over a dozen seconds from his sudden halt on the walk until he found himself in the street, an actor in the scene. A fat man behind him found his voice and shouted something hoarse and unintelligible after him, but the boy paid no heed. He was sprinting toward

the rearing mule-team, with his head high and his hands clinched like the winning runner in a hundred-yard dash. He was aware of but one thought pounding through his brain. An American in a strange land was in peril, and he was the only other American who could give him aid.

Even as he ran, he was conscious that there was but one way in which that aid could be rendered. The coachman had been flogging his team toward the corner ahead, with the evident intention of whirling into the side street and escaping the path of the runaway, when terror had gotten the better of his purpose and he had jumped from his seat. Rod gathered his muscles, fixed his eyes on the front seat of the lurching cab, and selecting an instant when the mules had apparently winded themselves, he gave a sudden upward leap into the vehicle, grasping for the flying reins as he did so.

Fortune was kind to him as he found when he recovered his balance and saw that his extended hands had closed over the lines. He probably could not have repeated the exploit again in a dozen trials, and no one realized better that if he had missed the lines, the situation would have been completely beyond him. The boy darted a swift backward glance toward the plunging runaway in his rear, and then kept

his eyes riveted on the backing mule-team and the corner ahead. Could he guide the cab into the side street before the bay horse reached the point of turn?

Rod braced his feet against the back-board, wound the lines about his wrist, and suddenly threw all his weight to the right. It was a risky move. It would be impossible to extricate himself from the reins if the mules refused to swerve in his direction, or if they should prove too strong for him and dash toward the runaway instead of away from it. It was a second of tense, gripping crisis. Rod's arms suddenly felt as though they were being torn from his shoulders. Then the rearing team whirled on their haunches as sharply and abruptly as though they were set on pivots, the cab hung dizzily on the edges of its wheels until it seemed that a breath would send it toppling, and then, lurching like an over-rigged ship in a heavy gale, it was jerked wildly along the jagged pavement as the mules, apparently more terror-stricken than ever, settled down to a fast and furious gallop as though they were determined upon but one thing—the annihilation of themselves and their driver as soon as possible.

Rod had a blurred, confused glimpse of a row of gaping faces along the curb, with the features all jumbled together as though they had been

painted on cloth and the colors had run. He had no time for coherent thought. Afterward it seemed to him that his greatest fear had been that he would lose his cap!

The corner was now not a dozen feet away. He began to throw his pressure on the right rein again. He had a vague impression that the mule on this side was the more tractable of the two.

Would he—could he—make the turn in time?

A hurried glance out of the corner of his eye showed that the runaway was gaining on the cab in swift bounds.

The young officer in the saddle saw his glance, and raised his voice in a hoarse shout of encouragement.

"Great work, old man! Hang on and you'll make it yet! Jumping bull-frogs! Look out for the curb, there!" Even as the warning was being uttered, the wheels of the cab reached the corner, swayed an instant on the edge as they ground against the curb, and then crunched by with a dozen splintered spokes and a cracked hub. Almost in the same breath, there was a swift clatter of hoofs at the boy's shoulder, a glimpse of a hatless, dishevelled young man gripping the reins of a wild-eyed bay horse, and the runaway was past with a clear path before it.

The turn had been made in safety. Rod realized this with a sharp indrawing of his breath

and a consciousness that his face and neck were bathed with perspiration. The bodies of the mules were covered with a white foam. The strain showed as greatly on them as on the youth at the reins. Already their furious pace was relaxing. Rod ventured to loosen his hold on the lines and shift his position to a more comfortable angle. The mules were rapidly becoming both winded and subdued. The boy flung a glance over the back of the seat and saw that the corner was now nearly a block away.

He gathered the lines suddenly in his hands, and gave a quick, firm tug with a sharp cry of whoa. As much to his surprise as to his relief, the team paused obediently, in fact coming to such an abrupt and unexpected halt that he almost pitched forward into the street before he could recover himself. A quieter, more docile, more innocent pair of mules could not have been found in all Colon. Their recent spasm of terror had passed as completely and suddenly as it had arisen. Had it not been for their white heaving bodies, Rod might have been tempted to doubt his own senses and regard the events of the past few minutes as the figment of a nightmare. A glance at his blistered hands and the splintered wheels of the cab, however, as he cautiously turned the team, effectually dispelled any lingering doubts as to their character that he

might have entertained. Moreover, he was becoming uncomfortably aware of some ugly bruises, and when he chanced to raise his hand he saw his collar had been torn away and his necktie lost. If he had won a bloodless victory, it was neither a painless nor a costless one.

At the corner he found that the attitude of the crowd had changed as suddenly as the danger had passed. The spectators who had scampered from the curb in terror a few minutes before formed a gesticulating, loudly talking circle about the exhausted team before he could spring to the ground. The cab-man, who had fled from his post, staggered through the crowd and resumed the reins with an amusing air of condescension. The storm passed, he was ready to pose as a hero.

As he caught sight of the damaged wheels, he turned with a loud cry and caught Rod by the sleeve.

"Senor, senor, you have ruined my cab! You have taken my bread from me!"

Rod stared in bewilderment. The man raised his voice and the crowd edged about his shoulders.

"I must have new wheels before I can drive again—new wheels, and I have not even money to buy feed. You are rich, senor. You must help me!"

Rod thought grimly of the sixty cents in his

pocket as he looked at the man's greedily outstretched hand. Before he could answer, a sharp voice broke into the cabman's whining sentences, and the crowd parted hurriedly as a perspiring bay horse halted suddenly at the curb and a dusty young man in the saddle flashed a contemptuous glance at the native's importuning figure. Rod recognized the victim of the runaway.

The young officer was angry and he showed it in his very first sentence. "If you're a wise man, cabbie, you'll climb into that front seat and drive away from here as you never drove before! I'm in no mood for trifling. Your cowardice nearly cost me my life, and now after you deserted your post, you have the impudence to ask for damages! For monumental nerve, you are the eighth wonder of the world! Now, get out! Do you hear? Get out! In plain American, beat it!"

The cabman did not wait for further argument. The sight of the stern-faced young officer seemed to wilt him instantly. The man climbed sullenly back to his seat, and as the crowd scampered from the neighborhood of his mules, he brought his long whip down on the backs of the now thoroughly subdued team and clattered off down the cobble-stones into the main street.

Rod was turning to follow him with a rueful thought of his damaged collar and a mental

ADVANCED TOWARD HIM WITH OUTSTRETCHED HANDS.

question as to how much of his sixty cents it would take to make the needed repairs when the young man on the horse slipped from his saddle and advanced toward him with outstretched hand.

"I say, old man, can you give me a tip as to just how I ought to put it?"

"Put what?" Rod repeated wonderingly as he took the sun-browned hand and noted that the other in spite of his lieutenant's uniform could not be more than five or six years older than himself.

"Why, my thanks for the service you have rendered me! Do you realize that you have saved my life and that if I value that possession at all you have put me under the biggest debt of gratitude one person can put another? I'm not much on oratory—in my class at the 'Point' I was always getting marked down for that—so I thought you might give me a few suggestions as to how to cloth the thoughts that are surging up in my bosom!"

Rod laughed. There was something in the twinkling gray eyes before him that forced one to respond to their owner's good humor. They reminded him vividly of Jack Winters, but the next moment he was sorry for the suggestion for it brought him back with an unpleasant shock to his own embarrassing situation and the

uncomfortable problem with which he was wrestling. The young lieutenant saw the swift change in his face and raised his eye-brows.

"Would you mind telling me your name?"

"Certainly not. Rod Standish, formerly of Boston."

"Well, I am Derrick Sterling and I am lucky enough to hold a lieutenant's commission in the Culebra Engineering Corps. Shake again, Standish! I used to know some mighty good chaps in Boston."

Sterling hesitated. "I say, if it's a fair question, what are you doing down here on this edge of nowhere?"

"I guess it's a fair enough question, and I'll give it a fair answer. I'm, I'm—well, I'm looking for work!"

Sterling whistled. "How long have you been here?"

"I came on the 'Eitel Frederick' this morning. You see, I haven't had a very long look yet."

Rod buttoned the broken ends of his collar together and turned up his coat to hide the absence of his tie. "Those mules gave me a rather hard tussle. I guess I'm due for a hurry-up visit to a clothing store."

Sterling came out of his preoccupied study. "I'm going to ask you another question, Standish. If I'm butting into your private affairs,

don't hesitate to say so. What made you think you could find a job down here?"

Rod kicked a stray piece of gravel from the curb, looked into the friendly gray eyes, and decided to return frankness for frankness.

"I have a partial engineering training for one thing—I was a student at the Boston 'Tech' until two weeks ago—and then I had a letter to an old friend of my father's, Captain Gray of Colon. I was just leaving his house when I saw your runaway."

"And what answer did Captain Gray give?"

"He didn't give me any. He has left on a trip to South America!"

Again Sterling whistled. This time before answering, he glanced down the walk. A native boy was idly running his toes into a yellow clay bank, studying the effect of the sticky earth on his sombre skin. The lieutenant raised his voice and held a dime up between his fingers.

"Here, you, do you see this money?"

The boy shuffled nearer with a suggestion of interest.

"Do you see this horse?" The youngster parted his teeth in an expanisve grin.

"Well, if you'll take this horse to the government corral, the dime is yours. Is that clear?"

"But what are you going to do?" Rod broke in.

"I'm going with you—or rather, you're going with me." Sterling caught him genially by the arm. "Our first visit will be to a gentleman who can replace that collar and tie of yours. Then we are going across to the government Y. M. C. A. club-house for a good long chat. Now, I don't want to hear any arguments. It's a hot day, and I have had a strenuous half hour."

In the next twenty minutes, Rod was given little opportunity for speech of any kind, of protest or otherwise. Whatever Lieutenant Sterling's faults might be, silence was not one of them, and Rod shrewdly divined that he had a purpose in monopolizing the conversation. It was not until after they had reached the Y. M. C. A. club house, after a satisfactory visit to a neighboring clothing store where Sterling's pocket-book had sought industriously to repair the damage of the rescue, that Rod found an opportunity to voice his growing bitterness.

"You're mighty kind and all that, and I appreciate it, but I ought not to take up any more of your time, Mr. Sterling. A chap that's out of a job, and down and out on his luck as I am, is a rather poor companion!"

Sterling gazed across at him with the twinkle showing again in his eyes.

"You are mistaken on at least one point, Standish. You are not out of a job!"

CHAPTER X.

Lieutenant Sterling's Secret Mission

LIEUTENANT Derrick Sterling leaned back in his chair, folded his arms, and slowly repeated his statement.

"No, you're not out of a job, Standish! You are going with me!"

Rod stared across at his new-found friend with a bewilderment so intense that the other burst into a peal of laughter.

"Can you be ready to leave Colon at day-break in the morning?" Sterling continued with a twinkle.

"I can go tonight, if necessary," Rod said, recovering himself, "but I would be immensely obliged to you if you would make your meaning clear enough to penetrate this befuddled head of mine!"

Sterling kicked aside his chair, and walked slowly across the veranda and back before he replied.

"To put it bluntly, Standish, I am on a secret mission for Uncle Sam!"

Rod stared.

"Doesn't that sound theatrical, though? Fact of the matter is, old man, that I'm rather impulsive, but I flatter myself that I can size up a chap that's true blue, and I know you won't betray my confidence. I presume the policy of wisdom for me would be to keep my lips closed, but I'm going to break away from it for once and give you my story. Of course, you have heard of the famous French engineer, De Lesseps?"

Rod nodded. "The man that built the Suez Canal?"

"Yes, and the man that tried to build the Panama Canal later, and failed. That was back in 1879, and his failure cost the French people something like a cool million francs!"

Rod whistled. "But what has that got to do with you and me?"

"I'm coming to that. De Lesseps came over to Panama with a flourish of trumpets and an army of men and scores of ship-loads of machinery and supplies. When the project finally fell through and the Canal was given up, practically all of the equipment was abandoned. Some of it was left in the heart of the jungle and was ruined by the weather. It was expensive machinery, and good machinery. The French are clever engineers, let me tell you. We can't improve much on most of De Lesseps' equipment

even today. Now I have finally reached the point of my story, as you will see in a minute.

"We have found that part of De Lesseps' machinery, in spite of the rust, can still be made over so that it can be utilized in the present construction work of the Canal, and save hundreds of dollars. Of course, lots of the machinery is worthless. And then lots of it has disappeared."

"Disappeared?" echoed Rod. "How?"

"Buried in the jungle! The Panama foliage is so dense and thick that you can almost see it grow. I have cut my way through jungle so heavy and tangled that it seemed to be fighting you like the claws of a wild animal. If it hadn't been for my machete, I would have been absolutely helpless. I could not have been more of a prisoner in that foliage if I had been bound with ropes. If a piece of machinery—I mean a good-sized piece—were left in the jungle for any length of time, even for a year, it would be buried by the underbrush almost as thoroughly as though the earth had swallowed it! Oh, I'm not exaggerating!" Sterling broke off, noticing Rod's glance of incredulity. "Last year, a party of American engineers were prospecting not far from Culbra. The old French map of De Lesseps showed the site of a construction camp in the neighborhood, but no one

had been able to find it and it was concluded that there had been a mistake in the map. While the party were fighting their way through the jungle, one of the men tripped, and as he fell, his machete struck against something hard which gave forth a sound like iron. An investigation was made, and what do you think was discovered? The abandoned French village was found—consisting of over thirty buildings, some of them large barracks, and ware-houses. You must remember that over thirty years had elapsed since it had been inhabited. The jungle literally had swallowed it!"

"Go on," said Rod, "what is all this leading to?"

"Simply this. We have recovered a whole lot of the old French machinery, and have found it so good, as I said, that we always keep our eyes open for more. A short time ago, the Chief—that's Colonel George W. Goethals, in command of the Canal, you know—heard of a lot of abandoned French dredges lying up in the jungle above the mouth of the Chagres River. He was given to understand that the machinery was almost worthless. In fact, the man who carried the information to him wanted to buy the whole lot and dispose of it as old iron. The chief was about to close the deal when two things occurred which aroused his suspicions

that all was not right. One of these was the man's eagerness to finish the transaction. The other was that the chief of police—Colonel George R. Stanton, a typical Rough Rider that you should meet on your first opportunity, Standish—happened into the office one day and recognized the man.

"Who was he?" asked Rod, who was deeply interested.

"You see, the chap's name is Bulger—'Big Bill' Bulger, they call him down here. Stanton has known him or known of him for several years, and says he is one of the most unscrupulous men on the Isthmus. As soon as he heard about the affair of the dredges, he said that he wouldn't take Bulger's estimate of their value under oath —that if 'Big Bill' said they were worthless, you could bank on it that they would bring a handsome sum. The end of it all was that Colonel Goethals told Bulger that he would have to take a week longer to decide, and in the meantime, he determined to make a thorough investigation of the whole affair for himself. Stanton is working night and day just now, and, anyway, his authority is confined to American territory so that it might prove awkward for him to undertake an expedition beyond the bounds of the Canal Zone in his official capacity. As a solution of the problem, he was good enough

to suggest that the Chief send me. So I left Culebra this morning with a couple of picked men that Stanton let me have from his staff, ostensibly on a three or four days' hunting trip, my real purpose being to find that machinery, examine its condition, and discover just how far Bulger is lying.

"And, of course, he doesn't know anything about your expedition?" Rod queried.

"Not he! The Colonel is going to try to keep him in Culebra until I get back. It will be worth something to unmask the man, even apart from the possible value of the machinery, for although Stanton has suspected him of crookedness for a long time, he has always been clever enough to cover up his trail or else keep just within the law."

"If that is true," said Rod musingly, "and he should by any chance, learn of your plans, he might make things unpleasantly lively for you out there in the jungle. From what you tell me of the Panama thickets, he would surely have some excellent opportunities!"

"You don't mean to hint, Standish, that you are afraid?" And then at Rod's sudden flush, Sterling said quickly, "Forgive me, old man! I ought to have known better than to have made that remark, after the way you showed your mettle this morning. Can I count on you?"

Rod hesitated. "There is nothing I would like better, but—"

"But what?"

"There are two obstacles. By a peculiar chain of circumstances, which I may tell you about some day, the limit of my available cash assets at this moment is less than one dollar—yes, a good bit less, and I fancy that a trip such as you have in mind demands a peculiar equipment, which frankly I am not in a position to buy. Then again, you will understand, that I have simply got to find steady employment at the first moment possible, and I hardly imagine that either you or I will have steady work looking for old French machinery!"

Sterling looked grave. "Really, old man, I had no idea things were so bad, but I think I can relieve your mind and dispose of your objections—if you have mentioned them all—in just about two minutes. In the first place, I can furnish you with all of the equipment that you will need—most of it out of my own kit. You and I are just about of a size, I fancy, and I happen to be pretty well stocked up. In the second place, I am sure that the Chief will put you to work at once as soon as we get back, especially if our trip should save the government from being badly swindled. The Colonel is an old friend of my father's, Standish—they graduated to-

gether at the 'Point'—and he has a rather warm spot in his heart for me, in spite of my faults, which you will find are both numerous and varied. And then, you seem to be forgetting that you saved my life, and that I would be a cad not to stand by you!"

For a moment, Rod stared silently out over the railing toward the gray-blue surf of the Atlantic. As he turned he saw that Sterling was holding his hand out toward him, and that the customary twinkle in his eyes had given place to an unusual earnestness.

"As I told you before, Standish, I'm an impulsive chap, but, hang it all, old man, I like your grit, and I'd like to be chums! What do you say? Will you go?"

"I'll go!" said Rod simply.

Sterling joined him at the rail and unfolded a small pocket map. "Now that's settled, I'll explain something of our line of march. This dot here is Colon. Over at the right there is the Chagres. You can see where it empties into the Atlantic," he said as Rod bent over his shoulders. "From what I understand, we should locate the lost machinery on the right bank of the river, possibly eight or ten miles from the mouth. Do you see the black spot here?" Sterling asked, indicating a point perhaps ten miles northwest of Colon. "This is Gatun, which is

famous as the site of one of the most wonderful engineering feats in the world. That is the great dam, which you know—or probably don't know—is to make the Chagres River into a monter artificial lake, over a hundred miles square!"

"A hundred miles square!" gasped Rod. "And is that to be a part of the Canal?"

"One of the principal parts. I will tell you all about that later when we strike Gatun. Talk about the Pyramids of Egypt! Why, my boy, you will think you have been taken back to the genii of the Arabian Nights when you see some of the little stunts that American engineers are doing down here in the Panama jungle. It makes me proud that I'm an American and an engineer, even if I am only on the tag end of the Big Job, myself!"

Rod's eyes sparkled, and he bent over the map again. Would he ever have the right to call himself an engineer? he asked himself wistfully.

"But to get back to our route," continued Sterling. "Here are two ways we could proceed. We could either take a launch and skirt around the Atlantic Coast line to the Chagres, and then beat our way up the river, or we could take the Panama Railroad to Gatun, and follow the river down through the jungle. You see, we will find the machinery somewhere between Gatun and the coast. I am inclined to the opinion

that this is much the better course for us to take, for two reasons. It is, of course, shorter and more direct, and then I imagine that after we reach the river, a boat will hamper rather than help us. If the dredges are located in the way Bulger describes, you could hardly find them from the water, and would have to leave the boat anyway and take to the brush. Have I made myself clear?"

"Quite clear!" Rod said.

"Then we will take the first train for Gatun in the morning!" Sterling snapped open his watch with an exclamation. "Jumping bullfrogs!" Rod was to find that this was the eccentric young lieutenant's favorite expression, and that, as the latter put it, he was able to give it fifty-seven separate and distinct shades of meaning! "Do you know what we have forgotten?"

"No, what?"

"That highly essential event of dinner. Come on, old man. I could eat even Panamanian cooking just now, myself!"

An hour later, Lieutenant Sterling pushed back his chair from the hotel table with a sigh of contentment. Rod had almost forgotten his food in a study of the novel characters around them. To the youth from Boston, they were of far greater interest than his meal, hungry

as he was. It was a typical border-crowd of the American tropics. Steel-muscled, sun-browned men in Panama hats and in khaki leggings, rubbed elbows with slow-moving, indolent diners in cool, neatly pressed white duck. The former had an odd habit of clipping their words, and their movements suggested the leader accustomed to command. It was with almost open contempt that they gazed at their languid, lounging neighbors, sipping iced "Rola" and complaining of the heat.

"I'll venture to say that you've never taken dinner in a more curious crowd than this!" said Sterling grinning.

"That is what I was thinking," responded Rod. "Are most of these men employed on the Canal?"

"Very few of them. The majority are what you might term real soldiers of fortune,—tropical tramps, always on the search for fortune, or adventure. To do them justice, I think most of them would rather have the adventure than the fortune. The story of their lives would make a book more interesting than fiction."

Rod thought of his father's knock-about career in the queer, unknown corners of the globe. Were these the men that had shared his dangers and hardships?

"True blue, every one of them!" said Sterling emphatically. "Rough in appearance, perhaps,

but they would give their last cent, yes, and their lives just as willingly, for a friend!"

"What is their chief occupation?"

"Most of them have several. They are on the hunt for gold one year, and the next year are helping to build a bridge or a railroad somewhere off in the jungle. Or they may be taking part in a revolution in one of those tea-cup republics down here that have one of those little events every other week—but not one of them would draw his gun in a dishonest cause. I could tell you a dozen stories of how they had refused to sell their services to a man or a government that they were convinced was not fighting fair."

Rod's eyes flashed. It all seemed like an echo of the stories of his father that used to arouse his enthusiasm in the old jaunts around Boston. He wondered if any of those wind-tanned, hard-muscled men would know the name of Captain Standish?

"Now for the other side of the picture," continued Sterling with a smile. "I mean our neighbors in white duck, who seem more fitted to hold a fan than a gun. They are mostly native planters and speculators, who have so many slaves to run at their nod that it has become almost an effort for them to do their own breathing. Some of them are from the Panama Sa-

vannahs, some from Jamaica, and I dare say many of them from Columbia and Brazil. When they are not indulging in a siesta, they spend most of the day sipping black coffee. But I say, Standish, I want to show you something more of Colon and Cristobal. A stroll will do both of us good."

Rod rose to his feet and followed his companion as they threaded their way among the little square tables toward the door. When they reached Front Street, Sterling hesitated undecidedly and then turned back toward the boundary of Christobal and the Atlantic docks.

"As a matter of fact, there are only two real points of interest here," he said as Rod fell into step. "One of them is the statue of our old friend, Christopher Columbus. And the other is the house that De Lesseps occupied during his residence in Panama. We'll call it 'De Lesseps' Palace,' and while it will fall a whole lot below your ideas of a palace, yet when viewed from the stand-point of Colon its name is pretty well justified. The French are always great on luxury, you know. I have heard that in the old French and Indian wars on the frontier, the French officers carried perfume and powder even on the roughest marches!"

"Hello there, Mr. Sterling! Don't you speak to your friends?"

The two whirled as a rough voice hailed them from the doorway of a corner curio store. A red-faced man in a huge Panama hat and greasy khaki leggins stood lounging in the entrance and grinning at the lieutenant in a manner that disclosed two rows of very yellow, very uneven teeth. Sterling was close under six feet in height, himself, but the other towered several inches above him, the effect of his immense stature increased by his broad-brimmed hat so that he looked a veritable giant.

CHAPTER XI.

A Council Of War

THE lieutenant flushed at the noisy greeting and half drew back as the man swaggered toward them, holding out a hairy hand with a deepening of his grin.

"Shake, Mr. Sterling!"

The lieutenant's shoulders stiffened, and the hard, grim look Rod had seen on his face when his runaway horse was plunging toward the rearing mule team, settled around the corners of his mouth.

"You must excuse me!"

The giant threw back his head with a boisterous laugh.

"So the dandy young lieutenant won't shake hands with 'Big Bill' Bulger, eh!"

The sudden revelation of the man's identity did not surprise Rod. Instinctively he edged nearer to his friend.

"By the way, lieutenant," Bulger continued, still laughing as though he regarded the whole affair as a joke, "I understand you are leaving

on a little hunting trip. Can I be of any service?"

"Not the slightest!" Sterling said stiffly. For the first time, an uneasy suspicion suggested itself to him. Was Bulger's presence in Colon something more than chance? Could it be that the man was following him?

Bulger's laugh ceased suddenly, so suddenly as to suggest that it had largely been forced.

"I know the jungle as well as any man in Panama, lieutenant, especially the Chagres River section." Sterling flushed at the emphasis on the Chagres River, although Bulger gave no sign that he noticed it. "I think I can give you some useful hints. Would you mind telling me where you are going?"

"Really, Mr. Bulger, that is my affair. I don't see what possible interest that can have for you! I am in a hurry just now, anyway. Come on, Standish."

Sterling turned away with a fine assumption of indifference. As Rod followed him, he saw that Bulger's grin had been succeeded by an ugly, menacing scowl, showing his yellow, uneven teeth more vividly than ever. Bulger raised his voice, with a harsh, venomous rasp which he did not try to hide.

"Never mind, Lieutenant Derrick Sterling. I know just where you are bound for just as

well as you do! And let me tell you, that's a dangerous piece of jungle down there, a *mighty* dangerous piece, for an untamed West Point youngster like you!" Sterling's hands clinched, but he did not turn nor respond. For the rest of the block, the two walked without speaking. It was Rod that broke the silence.

"Do you think he has found out your errand, Sterling?"

"I'm sure of it!" was the grim reply. "I'd give something to know how he did it!"

"I'm afraid you have made a bad enemy, old man."

"I don't care for that. A man like Bulger is generally a coward. But one thing is certain, Standish."

"What's that?"

"Bulger has a whole lot at stake, or he wouldn't make such an effort to follow me. I think I'll find Stantons' men, Brady and Dundy, and explain the new development in the situation."

"Do you think Bulger knows them?"

"I hardly think so. They are both new in the force, but it doesn't make much difference. It's just as well that he should understand that we are not alone. It's a good thing, sometimes, to impress the enemy with your strength. Are you beginning to be sorry for your bargain, Standish?"

"Not I! I came of a fighting stock, Sterling, and, anyway, I'd be worse than a coward to desert you now! Don't you think it would be wise to look up your men now and let the sight-seeing go? I can do that any time, you know."

Sterling nodded thoughtfully, and they abruptly changed their course. The lieutenant had arranged to communicate with the two police officers by telephone at the Cristobal headquarters if he should need them. Stanton had suggested that Sterling, himself, should not call at the building unless absolutely necessary, in order to keep a possible suspicion of their co-operation from being noised abroad. The young officer stepped into a telephone booth, and directed Brady and Dundy to join him at the Y. M. C. A. Club building. The men were so prompt in their response that Sterling and Rod found them already awaiting them, when they turned up the steps.

The four made their way to the second-floor veranda, and found a deserted corner, out of ear-shot of the groups of men that filled the building. It was a spot admirably adapted for a council of war, and into such, the discussion speedily resolved itself, after Sterling had introduced Rod to his companions.

"Standish, did you say?" repeated Dundy as he took the lad's hand." I don't imagine you

are any relation to Captain Ralph Standish, are you?"

"He was my father," said Rod.

"Your father? Well, this is a real pleasure! I was with your dad for two years in Nicaurauga, boy. Haven't you ever heard him tell of Jack Dundy and the big boa? I believe it was the largest and the meanest snake that ever wound around a tree, Brady! The thing got me on the edge of camp one rainy evening when I was hunting dry twigs to keep the coffee boiling. Before I knew what was happening, I was backed up against a tree, with three of the boa's coils around me and feeling as though some one had shut a folding bed up over me. If it hadn't been for Captain Standish, I reckon that Stanton would have assigned you another man for this little hunting trip of yours, lieutenant!"

"He never told me the story," said Rod thoughtfully. "What did he do?"

"No, it wouldn't be like him to tell the yarn," said Dundy, "the way he ended it. He heard my yell and came on the jump. When he saw the situation, he raised his rifle and banged away. But he missed clean, and it was his last bullet. I thought it was all up with me and shut my eyes to keep out the sight of the snake's waving head. The next thing I knew there was a shout and

a dull, heavy thud and that awful weight was off my chest. I drew a long breath of the sweetest air I have ever tasted, and loked around me like a chap that has just come out of a nightmare. The snake was lying in a limp, squirming circle on the ground and its head was beaten to a pulp. What do you think Captain Standish had done? He had jumped on that thing with his clubbed rifle,—yes, sir, gentlemen, with his clubbed rifle! There must have been a fight for a minute or two that would have made Hercules stiffen up. When it was over, the stock of his gun and the head of the snake were both finished!"

Dundy drew a deep breath, "I got him a new rifle when we struck a settlement, and we always called it the 'snake gun'! Did you ever see it, Mr. Standish?"

"Yes," said Rod, with a catch in his voice, "but he never told me how he got it. I have it with his things now."

"Where is he? You don't mean to tell me that—"

"He's dead, Mr. Dundy. It's been nearly a month now. I'd rather not talk about it for awhile, if you please."

Dundy suddenly bared his head and reached over and clapped the boy on the shoulder.

"I understand, lad. There are a lot of chaps

in the tropics—you might think them a little rough, but they're white clean through!—who will feel an empty place in their hearts when they hear that. So you are Standish's boy? Well, you've got his eyes, and that trick of closing your mouth is his, too, I'm mighty glad we are going to be together on this jaunt of Sterling's. I have an idea that before we get back, we'll be a whole lot better acquainted."

"When I tell you my piece of news, Dundy, I fancy you will make that prophecy even stronger," said Sterling grimly. "Bill Bulger is shadowing us!"

Dundy gave a prolonged whistle, and Brady, the silent, who never spoke when he could make signs serve the purpose, brought his hand down onto his knee with a sharp smack.

"I fancied the news would stir you a bit," continued Sterling, who rapidly narrated the story of the encounter in front of the hotel. "What do you make of it, Dundy?" he queried as he finished.

Dundy pondered the question reflectingly. "He means mischief, lieutenant, and when 'Big Bill' means mischief, it is just as well to keep the storm signals up. I imagine he must have lost his temper when you left him, or he never in the world would have shown his hand the way he did. What do you say, Brady?"

Brady tipped back in his chair, gazed thoughtfully at the toes of his shoes as though seeking inspiration from their square corners, and nodded his head slowly and solemnly.

"Bulger is a coward," continued Dundy, as he saw that his comrade had finished his contribution to the subject. "But sometimes a coward is more to be feared than a braver man. Bulger fights from behind a tree, where you can't see him. If he came out into the open, we wouldn't have nearly so much cause for alarm."

"Do you think he will follow us to Gatun?" asked Sterling.

"I wouldn't be surprised if we didn't see him again until we reached the jungle. He's much too cunning to show himself any more than he can help until we get away from the settlements. Just the same, if I have sized up my man right—and I will stake my twenty years of service that I have—he will know every one of our movements from now on. Bulger won't take any chances on our stealing a march. He's playing for a big stake, whatever it is, and unless he's blinder than a bat, he begins to see now that the government is suspicious of him."

"Do you think that he knows you and Brady are in our party?"

"He knows it now if he didn't know it before!" was the emphatic reply.

The lieutenant sat in a brown study for a moment. "Are there any changes in our plans that you would suggest, Dundy?"

"I don't think it would do us any good if we did make any chages. Bulger knows our destination, and if we don't hear from him before, we are bound to find him there. If those dredges are really valuable—and I am confident now that they are—'Big Bill' won't leave a stone unturned to prevent our finding them. But he can't stop us from reaching the jungle, and I don't think he will try. Besides, that isn't his game. It would be too risky. He will wait until we are beyond a settlement before he strikes. Then look out for war!"

Sterling rose to his feet. "Well, we will be ready to start in the morning, men. I have had my orders from the Chief, and I intend to put them through—Bulger, or no Bulger! We'll meet you at the station for the first train, and unless something I have not figured on turns up, we ought to be well down the Chagres by this time tomorrow."

"That's the spirit, lieutenant," said Dundy heartily. "And you can count on Brady and myself at your shoulders whenever you give the word to march!"

"Thank you," said Sterling gratefully.

Brady shook the young officer's hand, repeated

the action with Rod, and then with the air of a man who has sufficiently declared himself, disappeared through the doorway at Dundy's heels.

Under Sterling's guidance, Rod found the remainder of the afternoon lively enough to satisfy even his restless spirit. The lieutenant jotted down a list of the various items of equipment which he needed on the trip, and insisted on supplying those which Rod's stock did not contain, from his own supply. The lad had brought his rifle and hunting outfit from Boston, and as both had been bought under the direction of his father's expert eye, they were not only of a substantial quality but thoroughly practical. The entire list, Sterling found did not contain a single unnecessary article, and on the other hand, nothing had been overlooked that could contribute to the comfort of the hunter, even to a waterproof poncho. Sterling's eyes sparkled as he noticed an electric pocket lantern in the equipment.

"That article is apt to prove one of the most useful things you have brought, old man."

"I was half tempted to leave it at home," said Rod smiling. "You see I had no idea what I was going to strike down here, and I imagined I was bringing a lot of useless baggage along that would only be in the way."

"Well, as far as I can see, you havn't a use-

less article in the lot. You must have been in the woods before."

"I have been, said Rod dryly.

That evening as the two returned to their room in the hotel after a glimpse of Colon after dark—a decidedly dilapidated, straggling, uninviting Colon, too,—Rod asked the lieutenant thoughtfully, "I say, old man, can't you give me something about the history of the Canal? Of course, I've read a lot about it, but I feel that I have a personal interest in it now, and I would like to know more of the details than I do. I have an idea that you can give me a lot of curious information."

Sterling smiled. "You have struck me at my weakest point, or shall I say my strongest? I always did like to tell a yarn, Standish. Even when I was a youngster, they used to say that when I got thoroughly wound up, everybody else had to stop." The lieutenant changed his position to a rocker, and elevated his feet to a comfortable position on the edge of the table.

"The history of the Panama Canal," he said thoughtfully, "really begins with the adventure of the Man in the Cask."

CHAPTER XII.

Machete And Steam Shovel

"THE Man in the Cask," repeated Rod curiously. "That sounds interesting. I have read of the 'Man in the Iron Mask," but I have to confess that I have never heard of the other gentleman."

The lieutenant chuckled. "Between you and me, I find him much the more entertaining of the two. But you are wrong when you say you have never heard of him. I dare say, however, you wouldn't recognize him by that name. Surely, you must be acquainted with the exploits of Balboa, soldier and sailor of fortune and discoverer of the Pacific Ocean?"

"Of course!" said Rod. "You don't mean to say—"

"That Balboa was the 'Man in the Cask'? Exactly. In the early years of the sixteenth century, Vasco Nunez de Balboa—how is that for a four-storied name, Standish?—was a swashbuckling Spanish adventurer, selling his sword wherever he could get the most for it. He was a typical soldier of fortune, a dare-devil to his

finger tips, and his early exploits, before history ever heard of him, I imagine would fill a good-sized book, As was generally the case with a man of his type, he was heavily in debt, and finally his creditors began to press him so hard that his free and easy career was interrupted. In those times, a man who couldn't or wouldn't pay his debts could be thrown into prison and kept there. Balboa saw a dungeon yawning for him, and he made up his mind to leave Europe. Just then every one was talking of the fabulous wealth of the New World. Those were the days when people thought that gold could be picked up under the trees of America in buckets, and it was not strange that Balboa should become fired by the glittering tales that he heard. Before he could make his plans for a passage, however, his creditors learned of his intentions and he realized that the moment he tried to go aboard a ship he would be arrested. In this extremity, a friend came to his assistance.

"A disguise would hardly be effective enough under the circumstances, and it was hardly possible for Balboa to slip aboard as a castaway. His friend was quick-witted, however, and hit on no less an expedient than nailing the fugitive up in a wine-cask and storing him in the hold! Balboa was desperate enough to agree to anything, so a cask was made ready, and fitted with

a slender stock of provisions. A ship, bound for America, was chosen for the adventure and when her cargo was being carried on board, the cask with the imprisoned Balboa was taken over the side.

"It was not until the boat was two days at sea that Balboa worked his way out of his hiding place and appeared on deck. Then, of course, he was safe from danger of arrest. The narrowness of his escape was shown by the fact that his creditors, not content with an inspection of the passengers and crew, searched the boat from deck to hold, and more than once stumbled past the cask containing the man they sought."

"Was that the voyage that ended with the discovery of the Pacific?" asked Rod.

"Yes, but it was not until some time after his landing in Panama that Balboa undertook his expedition across the Isthmus. You see, the commander of the ship on which he had concealed himself was a friend of his, also a much-embarrassed Spanish adventurer by the name of Enciso, whose purpose was to cruise through the Indies and down the coast of South America on a treasure-hunt. Balboa joined his expedition, and was gone for over two years. His exploits during this period on land and sea brought him face to face with almost every

variety of danger from death by the poisoned arrows of the Indians to famine and shipwreck. Have you ever read Washington Irving's Life of Columbus and His Companions, Standish? No? Well, let me recommend it to you, old man, if you are as fond of adventure-stories as I am. It devotes several chapters to our friend, Balboa, and the early history of Panama that will surprise you.

"But to get back, or rather forward, to the discovery of the Pacific. The principal Central American colony at this time was at Darien. Enciso was put in command here when Balboa first reached the coast, but through jealousies among his officers, his power was weakened and he was finally deposed. Balboa stepped into his place, and Encisco returned to Spain to have his friends at court intercede for him. In the meantime, the Spaniards were inflamed by glowing tales from the Indian camp-fires of a wonderful sea still farther to the west that had never been reached by a white settler. Balboa, knowing that Enciso's influence at the Spanish court would place him in a dangerous position, determined to lead an expedition through the jungle in the hope of finding the strange western ocean and winning back the favor of the government at home by the discovery. Early in September of 1513 he made his start, accompanied by nearly

two hundred white men and a large force of Indians, with their funny hairless dogs, which are almost as useful to the native of the tropics as the Esquimeaux dogs are to the inhabitants of the Polar Zone.

"It was a dangerous line of march. Not only were they the first white men to penetrate the interior but they were hampered at almost every turn by the attacks of hostile Indians. The descendants of these Indians today, Standish, are the only unconquered tribe of red men on the American Continent and still successfully defend their territory from invasion, although it is hardly thirty miles from the line of the Canal. Sometime, if you will remind me, I'll tell you something of their present-day history.

"Balboa was obliged to fight more than one pitched battle, and lost scores of men in the engagements and was forced repeatedly to change his route. In the course of twenty days, he hardly averaged more than three or four miles a day, so you can understand how slow and tedious his progress must have been. It was the twenty-fifth of September, nearly a month after he had started, that one of his native guides pointed to a tall tree and told him in broken English that from its branches, the great western sea was visible. Whether Balboa believed the man or not, I don't know, but he made his way

up into the limbs, climbing higher and higher until away in the distance across the tangle of the jungle, the gray line of the Pacific came into view. I have often wondered, Standish, what his feelings must have been. Think of it, he was the first white man to gaze on the world's greatest ocean!"

"The water was only about twenty-five miles away. I have often walked that far in a day, myself, and yet how long do you imagine it took Balboa to reach it? Twenty-five days! The party had to chop every step of their way through a wall of trees and thickets so dense that it was almost like tunneling through solid earth. And it is that journey that really forms the first chapter in the history of the Panama Canal."

"What became of Balboa afterward?" asked Rod.

"The end that came to nine out of ten of those early explorers, whose deaths were as violent as their lives had been. You would think that a man who had made a discovery as great as Balboa's would have fame and fortune assured to him. But instead of riches and honors, in return for his wonderful exploit, he was beheaded."

"Beheaded!" echoed Rod incredulously.

Sterling nodded. "It happened like this. Enciso's friends never forgave him for the part he had played in that gentleman's downfall. One

of them, a man by the name of Pedrarias, was appointed governor of Panama, and made his headquarters in the old city of Panama, which later on was destroyed by pirates. He and Balboa clashed on a number of occasions, until finally Balboa determined to leave the country, and explore farther south. He had heard stories of the fabulous wealth of Peru, and fitted out a ship for the voyage down the Pacific.

"The day before he was to sail, Pedrarias, fearing that he would gain greater distinction if permitted to carry out his plan, arrested him on a trumped-up charge of treason. Curiously enough, the officer who took him into custody was none other than Pizarro, who a few years later was, himself, to undertake the very voyage that Balboa had planned. Had the latter been allowed to carry out his project, the chances are that he and not Pizarro, would have been the conqueror of Peru.

"Well, Balboa was thrown into prison and brought to trial before his friends could come to his assistance. The result, of course, was a foregone conclusion. He was found guilty and sentenced to death. The next day, in sight and sound of the great ocean of which he was the discoverer, he was led to the headsman's block, and his ill-fated life came to an end."

"When was the first real effort made to build

the Panama Canal?" ask Rod, as Sterling showed no disposition to break the silence. "I imagine that my question will make a jump three or four hundred years ahead of the days of Balboa, eh?"

"Not at all!" was the surprising reply. "I know that the popular impression is that the Canal is a comparatively recent project, but history shows that men have been trying to dig it for over three hundred years. Even as far back as the sixteenth century, an artificial water-way between the Atlantic and Pacific was one of the dreams of the Central American colonists, and several surveying parties were even sent over from Europe to explore the wilderness. The difficulties of the work and the dangers of the jungle were so great that many men began to have a superstitious belief that the Lord did not want the oceans to be joined—that He had separated them, and, that it would be flying in the face of Providence to attempt to unite them. After nearly fifty years of explorations in an attempt to find either a natural water-way or a site where a canal could be built, King Philip the Third, of Spain issued the most remarkable decree in the history of Panama."

"What was that?"

"Nothing less than an edict, pronouncing the sentence of death on any man that sought to build a channel between the two oceans!"

"Good gracious!" gasped Rod. "Do you mean to tell me that digging the Panama Canal, or trying to dig it, was once a crime punishable by execution?"

"That is practically what it amounted to, yes. It is almost impossible for us to appreciate the power of superstition three hundred years ago. You must remember that long after that we were hanging women in the United States for witchcraft. It is a curious fact," continued the lieutenant, "that in the first years of the history of the Canal, one ruler threatened death to those who tried to build it, and in the last years—that is, getting down to present-day facts—another ruler is offering rewards and medals to the men who should dig it. I refer to President Roosevelt. You know he ordered a number of honor-medals made which are to be given to men who have spent a prescribed period in the Canal service. They are worth earning too, by the way. I wouldn't mind having one myself."

"After the early Spanish days," said Rod, "was the project of the Canal forgotten?"

"Nothing of any real importance was done toward reopening the subject for over two hundred years," was the answer. "In fact, the next chapter in the story of the Canal brings us down to modern times. In 1819, Panama achieved independence from Spain, and the subject of

the water-way again came to the front, receiving fresh impetus when the California gold fever of 'Forty-Nine' broke out and most of the pioneers were forced to make the long voyage down around Cape Horn in order to reach California from the eastern coast of the United States. It was not until De Lesseps undertook the project in 1879, however, that actual labor in the digging of the Canal began, although a half a dozen routes had been surveyed all the way from Nicaragua to southern Panama. When it was announced that De Lesseps was at the head of a giant company, formed in France for the purpose of building the Canal and that $175,000,000 had been secured for the work, the public believed that the water-way was finally to become a reality.

"For ten years, De Lesseps pushed his operations. The original estimate of $175,000,000 was increased to $260,000,000 but it was all to no purpose. The whole venture was frightfully mismanaged. De Lesseps was a good engineer, but a poor financier, and the men whom he placed in charge of his various departments, betrayed his trust in every direction. Vast sums were squandered and vast sums were stolen, and in the end, De Lesseps saw that while his attention had been confined to the mechanical features of the work, his company had been brought

to the verge of bankruptcy. Then again, the French neglected the proper protection of their health, and disease made fearful ravages in the ranks of the workmen. Panama at this time was one of the worst centers of malaria and yellow fever in the world, and it was nothing unusual for twenty-five and thirty men out of every hundred in the French employ to be killed every year by the jungle fevers! De Lesseps made a really splendid fight, even although it was marred by so much mismanagement and dishonesty, but in 1889, he was forced to acknowledge himself defeated, and he retired to France, leaving nothing but a blackened trail of disaster to tell the story of his ten years' labor."

"Didn't France make another effort to build the Canal later on?" asked Rod.

Another company was formed, but it never did any active work. When the United States, shortly after the Spanish-American war, decided to undertake the project, negotiations were opened by our government with the French corporation and the latter agreed to dispose of all of its equipment and rights on the Isthmus for the sum of $40,000,000."

"Wasn't this pretty stiff?"

"No, indeed. It was really a great bargain, and the American government accepted it without much discussion. A treaty was formed with

Panama which gave us a lease of territory ten miles in width, extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and work under the American flag was started as soon as possible. Without counting minor efforts, we are the third nation to undertake the Panama Canal. If we succeed, we will finish the work nearly four hundred years after the plan first entered the minds of men."

Sterling had removed his collar and kicked off his shoes during the latter part of his account. As Rod arose to follow his example, he saw with surprise that it was nearly eleven o'clock.

"When does the government expect to finish the Canal?" he asked.

"If the present rate of progress continues," replied Sterling, "the first ship ought to go through it early in the year 1915. But I am not going to answer another question tonight, old man. I have talked myself hoarse, and we've got to be up and doing by six o'clock if we want to make the first train to Gatun. I'll leave you to dream of steam shovels and dredges, and don't forget the dynamite! You will find that it is a big word down here. Good night!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Into The Jungle

ALTHOUGH Lieutenant Sterling and Rod reached the Colon station a good twenty minutes before the departure of the Gatun train the next morning, they found Brady and Dundy already pacing up and down the platform, their tall, well-knit figures hinting vividly of steel muscles and years of out-door life. Even their walk had the quick alert tread of the man who is more at home in the forest than on the city pavement. It had been decided that the attempt to conceal the relations of the couple to the lieutenant's expedition was no longer necessary, in view of the strong probability that Bulger not only knew of it, but was making his future plans with that fact in view. Dundy, therefore, sauntered up to Rod and Sterling with a cheerful word of greeting, and Brady joined the trio a moment later.

"Have you seen any more of our friend, the enemy?" quried Dundy with a grin.

"He couldn't have vanished more completely so far as I am concerned if the earth had swal-

lowed him!" was Sterling's response. "You don't think there is any chance that he has given up the chase and gone back to Culebra, do you?"

"Not the slightest! That isn't Bill Bulger. I would be willing to wager a month's pay that he has an agent shadowing us this very moment!"

The suggestion made Rod turn uneasily, and sweep his gaze curiously around the platform. There were not more than half a dozen persons, besides themselves, awaiting the train. Of these two were obviously engineers, attached to the Canal staff, one was a little wiry Japanese seeming almost smothered under a huge Panama hat, another was a shuffling Jamaica negro with a greasy red badanna knotted about his neck, and the other two were a man and woman whom Rod recognized as fellow-passengers on the "Eitel Frederick,"—a consumptive-looking tourist and his wife. If Dundy were right, one of these was Bulger's spy. Rod glanced the list over again, and shook his head as Dundy smiled questioningly at him.

"There are only two that I would be at all suspicious of," he said hesitatingly. "One is the little Jap, and he looks too innocent. The other is the negro in the red handkerchief, and he looks too lazy."

Dundy chuckled. I have met that colored gentlement before. Let me tell you that he has a

pair of the shrewdest eyes and the sharpest ears in the tropics!"

"Then you think that he is Bulger's man?"

Dundy shook his head. "I didn't say so, but he is just the sort of chap that 'Big Bill' would be apt to press into his service. We call him 'Sleepy Sam,' but no one ever knew him to be asleep when there was an easy dollar to be turned, without too much risk from the police! The only man on the Isthmus that he is afraid of is Stanton, and I really believe that he fears the Chief as much as he does the old Voodoo priests!"

"Voodoo!" repeated Rod. "I have heard that expression several times. What does it mean?"

"It would take too long a story to tell you all that it means," answered Dundy. "It is the name of the mysterious heathen worship of the African and Jamaica negroes. But it is so well guarded that few white men have ever found out much about it. There are all sorts of weird stories about the practices of Voodoo, however, and I happen to know that there is a good deal of fact in some of them. For instance, last year Captain Stanton learned of three children that had been offered as human sacrifices to the Voodoo gods!"

"In Panama?" gasped Rod.

Dundy nodded. "Voodoo is almost as strong in certain parts of Central America and the West

Indies as it is in Africa. Its secret rites, I have read, are hundreds of years old."

Sterling glanced at his watch as the train whistle rang out suddenly.

"We are leaving exactly on time. This ought to bring us to Gatun before the sun is hot. Two-thirds of the work at Panama, you will find, Standish, is done before eleven o'clock."

The party found seats in the rear car, and had hardly settled themselves on the frayed red cushions when there was a grating, convulsive rumble, a series of short, sharp jerks, and the train got slowly and laboriously under way like a rheumatic horse ascending a steep hill. It was a curious train of the pattern of thirty years ago, with a small, undersized, under-powered engine, trying to make up in noise what it lacked in speed; a row of low, weather-worn cars, some of them with two long seats facing each other across a central aisle; and over cars and engine, train-crew and passengers a cloud of thin, yellow dust, oozing in through the doors and windows like a swirl of sand on the desert. But no one complained. Were it not for the little chortling engine, the only method of transportation across the Isthmus would be by foot or horse-back, and with the thermometer rising steadily above a hundred degrees, either method was hardly to be viewed with relish.

Remembering Dundy's remarks concerning Bill Bulger's spy, Rod glanced curiously down the car as the train pulled out of the station. There, sure enough, in the very last seat on the aisle sat the slouching figure of "Sleepy Sam," staring gloomily out of the window as though he had not an interest in the world outside the passing fringe of palm trees. Rod smiled grimly. It was just like a story of mysterious conspiracies and Secret Service agents and skulking criminals. What wouldn't Jack Winters, for instance, give to be with him! He could close his eyes and imagine Jack's grin when he wrote him of the story.

The view from the dingy car windows was of peculiar interest to Rod, fresh from the scenery of New England. The winding line of the track twisted through the jungle for all the world like the path of a gigantic snake, now plunging in a long, straight line through a heavy green canopy of trees, so thick and heavy as almost to brush the car windows, and again thrusting its way nearly over the brink of a crumbling hill, or skirting the edge of a frowning black morass. Often the wall of the jungle-foliage was slashed by the colors of the rainbow, until Rod's emotions found vent in a long whistle of admiration. Tall, arching ferns grew side by side with great, luxurious cannas, spreading their festoons of red-

spiked flowers like a boy waving a flag. Monster coleus plants, with their leaves splashed with almost every shade from a delicate pink to a glaring orange, crowded against curious air-pines with their clouds of soft-hued blue blossoms like the tint of the sky on a summer afternoon. Rare specimens of the orchid family, that would have warmed the heart of a collector, thrust their tangles of pink and lavendar and purple petals into the shadows of the over-hanging palms. And over all the silence of the jungle brooded, sullen and depressive, as though the wilderness resented the coming of the steel rails and the puffing engine, and would crush them far under the tangled underbrush if it had the power.

Once a yellow stream cut through the trees, a crooked, lazy stream, with a row of frowsy bushes on one side, and a very slippery, very steep mud bank on the other side. Rod bent forward with a cry as the surface flashed into view. In its center, a group of half a dozen native women were standing waist-deep, holding short, broad wooden paddles over their heads as they raised their eyes listlessly towards the cars. On a row of round, flat rocks at their feet was a motley stack of garments, evidently in the last stage of a vigorous scrubbing.

"Do you admire the Panamanian 'button-breakers'?" asked Sterling with a grin.

" 'Button-breakers'?"

"That name is an American importation. These are a group of native washerwomen. We call them 'button-breakers' because their method of scrubbing never leaves a whole button on a garment entrusted to their mercies. They believe in muscles rather than wringers and stones and paddles rather than wash-boards. This may be Nature's way, but it is rather hard on the clothes of civilization!"

Gatun is ten miles from the port of Colon. The average train in the United States would cover the distance in twenty minutes at the outside, but neither the equipment nor the road-bed of the Panama Railroad is conductive to speed-records. It was nearly three-quarters of an hour after the train had left Colon when the blast of its whistle announced that it was nearing the Gatun station.

A toy village of little square houses perched on the top of a red and yellow clay hill, with a green fringe of nodding trees away off in the distance, no matter how you might turn. This is Gatun—the American Gatun. The Panamanian Gatun is huddled on the other side of the Chagres, a sullen, gray river curving around the foot of the hill—a curious river of many moods, with the shallow water at the shores dragging along as though it had hardly life enough to move, and the deeper water beyond gradually

awakening into action until in the center it bubbled and foamed and sputtered and lashed its gray and yellow current into a perfect frenzy, as though it was angry at itself and the world in general for having permitted its slumbers to be disturbed.

The native Gatun is far different from the well-cared-for village nestling under the Stars and Stripes. It is a little more than a straggling circle of unkempt, unpainted houses, some of them built of rough boards, with ragged cracks between, but most of them fashioned of straight, yellow bamboo, with dirty thatched roofs.

In one of these Rod saw a typical Panamanian family group as the party trudged up the narrow dusty road that wound away from the station. A native woman with her hair bound in a red handkerchief was sweeping the hard clay floor, with two quarreling, naked children hanging to her crumpled skirts. A third child, also naked, was playing about a rude brick fireplace in the yard, while an older girl was amusing herself with a long green lizard, blinking at her in the sunlight. In one corner of the house a gibbering monkey was industriously tearing the overhanging thatch, while a squawking parrot, with a bright yellow head and green and red wings, was swinging in the doorway and muttering strange things to itself. As Rod and Sterling reached

the end of the yard a greasy, grunting pig, with its black tail twisted into a tight ring, waddled slowly and laboriously around the other end.

"This is the native life of the Panamanian jungle," grinned Sterling, waving his arm in a comprehensive sweep. "People who do not know what it is call it the simple life and recommend us to try more of it. By the way, Dundy, did you notice whether 'Sleepy Sam' left the train when we did?"

Dundy jerked his hand toward a long, low, weather-beaten building, before whose open door a creaking sign gave notice that provisions were for sale within.

"If you'll take a look inside, lieutenant, you will find your man. He dodged into the door just before you asked your question."

Sterling looked grave.

"I don't like that, Dundy. What do you say?"

Dundy brought his right hand to his shoulder and down again, tapping his muscles suggestively. "If you say the word, lieutenant, I think that a few moments' argument with the colored gentleman,—yes, a *very* few moments—will convince him that he has pressing business in another direction!"

For the first time Brady brightened up, turning his head eagerly to await Sterling's reply.

The lieutenant debated the question silently, and finally shook his head. "It's too risky, men. If a blow is going to be struck I want the first to come from them. Then the harder and faster we hit the better, but I want them to open the battle! And anyway, even if we did get rid of Sam, there would be others. For my part I begin to think that our best course will be to strike down the Chagres without delay. I had thought of waiting at Gatun a few hours to give Standish a view of the diggins, but—"

"Don't bother about me," Rod broke in. "I am under orders, old man. There is too much at stake for any false notions about *that!*"

"All right," said Sterling slowly. "Then we'll make for the jungle at once, Dundy. You know this country a whole lot better than I do. If you'll guide, we will do our best to keep up with that Indian pace of yours."

For another mile the quartette kept almost directly ahead, with the sluggish waters of the river an easy stone's throw away, the huts of the settlement growing more and more scattered until they finally disappeared in the thickening clumps of palms. Dundy led the way with a long, swinging stride, which had become second nature to him in his years of wilderness life. His hardened muscles seemed scarcely putting forth an effort, but Sterling knew from experience

that the pace would cover at least four miles and a half an hour. He glanced across at Rod more than once, curious as to how the strain was affecting him, but the youth smiled easily back at him, successfully hiding his fatigue if he felt any. As a matter of fact, his fall gridiron training and his long week-end tramps were coming into excellent play. The brisk stride instead of exhausting was exhilarating him in spite of the gradually increasing heat.

Dundy turned abruptly toward the river-bank as Sterling's watch showed that it had been fully half an hour since the last Gatun hut dropped from view. The under-brush at the edge of the stream was so tangled that the party was compelled to drop into single file, and even then it was only by a vigorous exercise of their arms that they were able to force their way to the water.

"This will give you an idea of what we will strike when we get into the heart of the jungle!" laughed Sterling, as a sweeping branch sent Rod's hat spinning.

Dundy was already at the edge of the river, pushing back the over-hanging bushes and thrusting a long bamboo stick into the shadows which he could not reach. Brady grunted impatiently as the other covered a dozen steps up the river and then slowly began to retrace his way.

"What's the matter?" asked Sterling.

"Matter?" growled Dundy. "There ought to be a skiff along here. Brady and I stowed it away last spring on a fishing excursion. The river was so high that we decided to beach the boat, and cut through the jungle to Gatun. That boat would come in very conveniently just now for the next five or six miles of our trip. Are you sure, Brady, that this is the place?"

Brady pointed at a small cross, cut in the trunk of a stunted palm. "That's our mark, Jack! Don't you remember that I broke my knife finishing it?"

"Perhaps some prowling native has stumbled on the boat and made away with it," suggested Rod. Dundy shook his head.

"Don't you think I know how to hide a skiff after twenty years in the jungle?" The next moment, the sentence was followed by a sharp ejaculation, as Dundy's bamboo slipped, and he fell prostrate over an obstruction in the brush. He scrambled to his feet with a flushed face and then reaching into the thickets, began to pull desperately at an object concealed within.

"By Jove, it's the boat!" Sterling muttered, springing forward to his assistance. As the lieutenant obtained a glance at the skiff at Dundy's feet, however, he drew back with a long whistle of amazement. The bottom of the boat had been

deliberately hacked to pieces until it was absolutely ruined!

Dundy straightened with a curious expression, opened his lips as though to give vent to an emphatic utterance of his emotions, and then silently motioned to Brady to view the wreck. The other bent carefully over the ruined boat, even forcing his way deeper into the thickets for a glance at the stern. When he finished his inspection, he muttered a low word to Dundy, and the two made their way a short distance up the river, engaged in an excited conversation. Rod and Sterling sat down wonderingly on the edge of the skiff, awaiting their return.

It was Dundy who spoke first as the pair slowly made their way back.

"You can prepare yourself for a surprise, Lieutenant. Bill Bulger is just ahead of us!"

CHAPTER XIV.

An Astonishing Development.

FOR a moment, Sterling stared at Dundy without speaking. Then his glance wandered from his stalwart figure to the ruined skiff.

"I don't quite grasp your meaning, Dundy. Of course, you have your reasons for what you say, but to a tenderfoot like I am, it's a good deal of a blank page. Has the boat anything to do with your statement?"

"Everything!" was the laconic answer. "There are two points about the skiff there which probably would never strike you. With all due apologies to West Point, there is nothing as essential to jungle skirmishing as a knowledge of woodcraft. I don't know a thing about the fine points of soldiering, but I think I can pat myself on the back when it comes to knowing the woods. The moment I saw that boat, I knew that the man who hacked it up had done the work not more than two hours ago, perhaps not more than an hour. And I knew that it was a white man to whom we are indebted, and not a native. A native would have stolen the boat and sold it for junk if he couldn't have used it."

Sterling nodded. "I can understand that point, Dundy, but how did you know the damage was done recently? Couldn't the boat have been hacked up yesterday?"

"A woodsman with half an eye would see that was impossible, Mr. Sterling. The dews would have soaked into all the fine splinters, and the freshness of the cuts would have been gone long ago. Then if you will look at the brush, you will see that the twigs and leaves are still bent. In another three or four hours, most of them would have been straightened. No, Lieutenant, the mischief is not two hours old, and unless I am more mistaken than I have ever been in my life, the man who did it is keeping mighty close on our trail."

Rod looked up from an examination of the skiff as Sterling wrinkled his brow in perplexity.

"But how do you know this is Bulger's handiwork, Mr. Dundy?"

Dundy thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out the broken handle of a much-worn jack knife.

"He was in so much of a hurry that he forgot to cover his traces. He left this behind him."

Sterling and Rod bent eagerly over the marred surface of the knife-handle. In the rough wood were traced the angular letters—

B. BULGER.

"This is probably what happened," said Dundy thoughtfully. "Bulger stumbled on the skiff by accident. He is, no doubt, in a boat himself and perhaps landed here for a survey of the trail, but that is immaterial, the point is that he found the skiff, and saw that little private mark of Brady's and mine on the tree. I am afraid that is better known that we have thought it was, eh, Brady? That the boat belonged to us was not such a far-fetched conclusion of Bulger's as you might think. He knew we were bound this way, and that we should use the skiff. So he put it out of commission."

Brady raised his eyes from a study of an undersized lizard, sunning itself on the edge of a log. "I believe that we ought to be under obligations to Mr. Bulger, Jack," he said in his quiet, drawling voice.

"Obligations?" echoed Dundy. "Why?"

Brady's glance returned to the lizard. "He has given us a warning that even a blind man couldn't stumble by. We know now that he is in these woods, and that he means to hit us hard —if he can. If we let him do so after this little hint, I am going to give my resignation to Stanton the minute we get back."

Sterling turned back into the brush. "I suppose there is no use to stay here any longer. What do you say? Is it forward, march!"

"Forward, march, it is," was the grim reply. "That little remark of yours, Brady, has spurred me up. We ought to do five miles more, Lieutenant, before we sample those sandwiches of yours."

And they did,—nearer six miles, in fact, before Brady called a halt in a little clearing that was so near the river's edge that only a thin screen of tangled foliage shut out the view from the stream. Rod was about to tear this aside when Dundy caught his arm.

"Better let it alone, Mr. Standish. Remember that we are in the enemy's territory, and the longer we can cover our movements, the better."

The jungle was now so wild that the thick branches of the trees cast a deep gloom over the ground. Rod was surprised to find that the sun was as bright as ever when he peered out onto the river. The heat had increased rapidly, and the humidity, instead of being lessened in the shadows, was felt even more strongly under the heavy, interlacing branches. Rod had long since unloosened his collar, but in spite of this, his face and neck were bathed in perspiration. The morning's tramp had been almost devoid of incident. Once, there was the flash of a skurrying gray object in the branches, and as Rod peered up in sudden alarm, he caught an indistinct view of a staring, hairy countenance hardly larger than a

baseball. It was his first monkey at home. On several occasions, there was a flutter of busy wings and the glitter of gay plumage as a curious parrokeet thrust its slender head down toward the quartette and then vanished with a frightened screech. Sterling had stumbled on a sleeping snake, but the reptile wriggled off through the underbrush without offering to give battle—a thin coil of green and gray, almost invisible in the foliage. It was with a distinct feeling of relief that Sterling and Rod caught Dundy's nod to halt and threw themselves on the grass, as soft as a huge piece of glossy velvet.

"We can be more than four or five miles from the mouth of the Chagres," said Dundy as he helped unwrap the packets of lunch which the lieutenant had ordered at the hotel at Colon. "If Bulger was telling Colonel Goethals the truth, we can't be very far from the dredges. I should say that with fair luck, we ought to strike them in the next two or three hours. What do you think?"

Sterling nodded. "Bulger gave the Chief to understand that they were at least three miles from the coast. If that is the case, we ought to know very soon what the gentleman's little game is."

Brady finished the opening of the box of sardines in his hands and gravely passed it to Rod.

"I don't want to discourage you, Lieutenant, but if Bulger is trying to defraud the government, we are not going to find the machinery in a hurry."

"You are pessimistic, Brady," said Dundy with a chuckle.

"I can't help it. I feel like a chap that has mistaken an alligator for a log and expects every minute that it will yawn and swallow him."

"Speaking of 'gators," said Dundy, finishing his second sandwich, "suppose you tell Mr. Standish that little story of yours of the Yankee speculator."

"What has speculation got to do with alligators?" asked Rod.

"A good bit in this case," said Brady, deftly spearing a sardine. "I'm not much on story-telling. Dundy could tell the yarn a whole lot better than I can, and if I don't put in the right trimmings, you can blame him. A salesman from Boston went down to Columbia a few years ago to sell shoes, and convince the natives that it was better for their health to wear the coverings of civilization on their feet than to go barefooted. He was a man who kept his eyes and ears open, and one day after an acquaintance had taken him on an alligator hunt, he came to the conclusion that he could make money a whole lot easier than by selling shoes to the Columbians. The plan that

had suggested itself to him was nothing less than cornering the alligator market and shipping the skins to the northern markets.

"Of course, it would hardly be profitable to rely on his skill and luck in shooting such alligators as he might find along the rivers and sandbars. This would be too slow and cumbersome a method. It was here where his Yankee ingenuity solved the difficulty.

"He went into the jungle with several dozen chickens, and a large bundle of sharply forked poles. Selecting the points where the animals were most plentiful, he fastened the poles to trees, overhanging the water, and tied a chicken to each, leaving them dangling over the stream while he and his men waited in the brush. In the course of time, the smell of the chicken attracted the attention of a hungry 'gater, and the unsuspecting creature swam close up under the pole, and made a lunge for the enticing bait. Of course, the prongs of the stick were wedged into its mouth as its jaws closed, and the sharper its struggles, the deeper they penetrated. In short, the alligator was caught in a trap, from which there was no escape, and it was a comparatively easy matter to dispatch it."

"And did he really make it pay?" asked Rod curiously.

"So much so that during the first season he

shipped forty thousand skins to New York at $1.75 each. How's that? And the next year, his shipment increased to sixty thousand skins. The only difficulty was that the stock failed to keep up to the demand. Even the Columbian jungle couldn't supply alligators at this wholesale rate, and the Yankee was confronted with the alternative of finding a new base of operations or retiring from business. I believe he retired, but he had made a comfortable fortune in the meantime."

Dundy rose to his feet with a yawn as he finished the story, and making his way to the edge of the river, he cautiously parted the bushes and swept a long, scrutinizing glance up and down the stream. To all appearances, the neighborhood was absolutely deserted, but the sergeant's face wore an expression that was far from reassuring when he returned.

"Is all quiet along the Potomac?" asked Sterling.

"Too quiet," was the significant reply.

The future progress of the party differed materially from the free and easy stride of the morning. Dundy's eyes seemed to be describing a constant circle, and his rapid, restless steps changed to a stealthy, silent glide, often pausing altogether as he leaned forward with his hand to his ears, and his gaze searching the shadows as

though studying every rustling bush. During the course of an hour, the quartette covered less than a third of the distance which the same period had recorded at the beginning of the trip.

Rod calculated that they were fully nine miles from Gatun when Dundy motioned Sterling to his side, and said in a low tone, "What would you think of a division of forecs, Lieutenant?"

"A division?"

"Suppose you and Standish keep to the trail, while Brady and I beat through the jungle. If those dredges are on this side of the river, they ought to be somewhere in the radius of half a mile. They may be back from the water, or they may have been left on the bank. The foliage is thick enough to hide them from a boat, even if they were only half a dozen feet away. If Brady and I cover the territory inland, and leave you the river, we'll save time and work. What do you say?"

The plan had its advantages and disadvantages, but as the latter hinted of a fear of Bulger if left alone, Sterling at once nodded an assent. Something of the young officer's thoughts, however, were divined by Dundy's shrewd eyes, and his rough hand clapped him heartily on the back.

"We won't be more than a quarter of a mile away at the outside, Mr. Sterling, and you can rely on reinforcements at the first sound."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that, exactly," said the lieutenant in confusion, "but——"

"I understand," rejoined Dundy kindly. "If the next hour fails to bring results, we'll shape our course back toward the river and meet you."

The silence of the great forest seemed deeper and more forbidding than ever as the bushes closed behind Dundy and his companion, and Rod and Standish were left alone. They might have been the only persons in a radius of miles. Sterling led the way without speaking, with his head bent as though he were busy with his thoughts, and Rod did not disturb him. There was no method of telling how far Brady and Dundy had worked away from them. To all intents and purposes, the jungle had swallowed them, but it was easy to realize that this would have appeared equally true if they had only been ten yards distant. At the suggestion, Rod glanced over his shoulder with a sudden nervousness. If a friend could be so near without his presence being known, the same fact would apply to an enemy. He was relieved when Sterling paused at a small opening in the foliage, extending down to the river.

"Do you think we are keeping near enough the water, Standish?"

"We could hardly make much progress if we were any closer," said Rod, nodding toward the

dense clumps of rioting vines. "We would need an axe to clear any sort of a passage."

"That's true," Sterling rejoined, mopping his forehead. "There must be a fortune in that old machinery if Bulger is planning to move it out of this thicket. This is worse than bucking a foot-ball line."

"That is just what I was thinking," said Rod ruefully, lowering his head and shoulders in an effort to dodge a vicious vine, as Sterling drew a deep sigh and pressed forward again. But their steps were halted in a sudden and startling manner.

There was a crashing in the bushes at their right, and as the two instinctively drew back, the under-brush was hurriedly parted and Brady's flushed face appeared at their side.

"Quick, Lieutenant! We've found them!"

"The dredges?" gasped Sterling incredulously.

"Yes, the dredges!" repeated Dundy exultantly. "I thought you would be the ones to locate them, nearer the river, but we ran right into them almost in a straight line from the trail. I left Brady on guard, and I imagine he is beginning to wonder what has become of me. Come on! You'll find it hard work beating through these thickets, but I've broken a path."

As he spoke, Dundy turned back into the

under-brush, and Rod and Sterling sprang forward at his heels. The excitement of the hunt had swept aside all thoughts of fatigue. Even the fear of Bill Bulger and his lurking henchmen were for the moment forgotten.

The end of the quest was in sight at last. The hidden spoils of the Panama jungle had been found. Rod was conscious of a tingle of victory, almost as great as though Sterling's mission had been his. In the thrill of the moment, even the lashing arms of the heavy foliage, which seemed to strike at them with redoubled viciousness, failed to check his energy. His face and hands were cut and bleeding, and there was a long, jagged rent in his sleeve, but he did not know it, and if he had, there was no time nor opportunity to stop to repair damages.

Brady's figure burst on their strained vision abruptly, as they rounded a tall palm, almost buried under the masses of a giant air-plant, and it was with something of a shock after their frenzy of excitement that they saw he was lazily reclining on a log, blowing a cloud of peaceful blue smoke upward from his battered pipe-bowl. He nodded carelessly as they came to a panting halt.

"Well, I guess we have located the machinery, Lieutenant."

"So Dundy says," Sterling responded, star-

THEY WERE ALMOST UPON THE GREAT MASS OF APPARENTLY JUMBLED ROCKS.

ing curiously about the little clearing. At the farther edge was what at first glance appeared to be a huge mass of moss-covered boulders. Brady rose from his log, and jerked his hand toward the pile.

"It's been thirty years since they were dumped into the jungle."

"You don't mean to say those are the lost dredges?" cried Rod.

"Look for yourself," was the terse rejoinder, as the two ran curiously across the clearing for a closer inspection. It was not until they were almost upon the great mass of apparently jumbled rocks that Rod saw that it was in reality a large heap of rusted machinery before him. A person could have passed within a yard without suspecting the fact.

"What do you make of it, Brady?" asked the lieutenant suddenly.

Brady glanced thoughtfully into the dead ashes of his pipe a moment without answering.

"I have had a fairly good look since Dundy left," he answered slowly, "but I'm not an expert, and you are. Suppose you make an examination yourself first, and see if your opinion tallies with mine."

There was a peculiar inflection in his voice which made Rod look suddenly back at his tanned, wrinkled face, but it was as inscrutable

as a mask. Sterling made the rounds of the machinery in silence, and even asked Rod to hold him while he dug his fingers into the vines, and made a slow and painful ascent to the top. It was perhaps a quarter of an hour later that he sprang back to the ground and accompanied Rod back to the log where Brady and Dundy were waiting.

"What is your verdict?" asked the latter, glancing up with a smile. "Have we proven our friend, Mr. Bulger, is indulging in a fraud?"

Sterling dug the toe of his boot into the ground and his hands into his pockets.

"I'll own that I am completely flabbergasted," he said. "That machinery is good for absolutely nothing except scrap iron! Mr. Bulger has been telling us the truth."

As Rod stared at his friend in amazement, Brady brought his hand down onto his thigh with a resounding clap.

"That is just what I have been telling Dundy, and he wouldn't believe me."

Dundy wrinkled his brow in perplexity. "But if that is the case, Lieutenant, and those dredges are worthless, what is Mr. Bulger's game?"

Sterling threw himself onto the ground and rested his hand on his elbow. "Ask me something easy. The fact is clear enough, at least from a hurried examination, that the machinery

is just what Mr. Bulger represents it to be. It is of so little value to the government that I should say his offer to buy it was a very fair one."

Dundy shook his head. "That wouldn't be Bill Bulger! And if he had nothing to fear, why is he shadowing us?"

"Perhaps it is merely curiosity."

Dundy looked unconvinced. "You'll have to give a better answer than that."

"Anyway," Sterling answered after a pause, "our work is done. We have found the machinery. I'll make another examination, but I am confident that my report won't be changed. What do you think, Standish? You haven't had a word to say yet."

Rod walked back from the edge of the clearing where he had been peering thoughtfully at the huge heap of rusted iron and tangled vines. It had a strange fascination for him in its grim mystery! What tales those abandoned dredges could tell if they could talk!

"I have a theory," he began hesitatingly, "But perhaps I hadn't better mention it. You know the subject a whole lot better than I do, and it seems rather presumptuous for me to offer my suggestion."

"Rot!" said Sterling emphatically, "we're all together on this expedition. Out with it!"

Rod flushed. "Are you quite sure that you have found the right machinery?"

Dundy sprang to his feet with a sudden gleam. "What do you mean, Mr. Standish?"

"Bulger would not have followed us here if there was only a lot of scrap iron at stake," Rod said thoughtfully, "Perhaps the dredges he is trying to get possession of are located in some other place and these are only a blind, or maybe some that we have stumbled on by accident."

"Jumping bull frogs!" ejaculated Sterling. "That idea is tip-top, old man."

Dundy solemnly reached over and grasped the boy's hand. "I believe you're right, Mr. Standish."

"We certainly ought to beat down to the river's mouth and back again on the strength of it," said Sterling, musingly. "Eh, Dundy?"

"You've expressed my sentiments exactly."

"And if you *are* right, Standish," continued the lieutenant heartily, "and we balk Bulger's little plot after all, the credit will be yours."

"Oh, bosh!" said Rod coloring, "One of you would have——"

But the sentence was never finished. The youth suddenly brushed Sterling aside, and sprang headlong into the brush. The next moment a dark figure bounded from behind a moss-covered stump and darted off among the trees.

CHAPTER XV.

The Camp on the Chagres.

"A SPY!" cried Dundy in amazement, "And I never suspected it. After him, boys! He can't get away!"

But he did. Fate and a twisted vine were with him. As Rod plunged through the brush, with his head bent and his eyes on the lithe, active figure ahead, his toe caught fast in a hidden obstruction and the next instant he was hurled heavily to the ground. The fall stunned him and he laid heavily on the earth as Dundy and Sterling reached him. As they paused, however, he struggled to his elbow and with the aid of the lieutenant's hand reached his feet, thoroughly shaken, but otherwise unhurt. The delay, slight as it was, was fatal to the pursuers. The skulking spy had disappeared in the jungle.

It was a somewhat crestfallen quartette that returned to the clearing. Dundy savagely kicked the log on which he had been resting.

"I guess our hats come off to a tenderfoot, Brady. How did you spot the fellow, Standish?"

"Oh, it was simple enough," Rod said, delicately feeling of what promised soon to be a generous black and blue spot on his thigh. "I happened to be looking at the stump and saw the tip of his shoe. I wasn't sure at first what it was. Thought it was a root, you know, until it moved. Do you think it was one of Bulger's men?"

"Sure of it!" said Dandy, emphatically, "and I wouldn't be surprised if the chap wasn't lying behind those bushes during our whole conversation."

"Whew!" gasped Sterling, "That effectually puts an end to any chance of blinding Bulger, doesn't it? I thought we might make him think that we were satisfied with what we had found, and had decided to go back to Colon by way of the coast."

Dundy shook his head gloomily. "No, you can wager that if Standish's suspicions are correct and 'Big Bill' is really trying a fraud, the report of his man will thoroughly open his eyes. There is no use disguising the fact that unconsciously we have made a bad mess of things."

"Well, there's no turning back now," said Sterling doggedly. "We've got to follow our original plan until either we locate another stack of dredges or convince ourselves that none exists. And the sooner we get under way again, the better! Are you ready, Dundy?"

In answer, the police officer caught up his coat, stuffed his pipe back into his pocket, and plunged again into the dark fringe of the trees, with the remainder of the party falling into the single file that they had maintained during the morning. Dundy led a course slantwise toward the Chagres, reaching the bank of the river a quarter of a mile farther on. Sterling's watch showed that it was nearly five o'clock. Dundy showed no disposition to halt, however. Pausing only long enough to locate his bearings and make a cautious survey of the placid surface of the river, he turned back into the brush, this time maintaining a distance of only a few yards from the water. In this manner, the journey was continued for the better part of another hour. Rod was not surprised when Sterling announced in a tone of satisfaction, in spite of the weariness which he did not try to conceal, that they were within less than half a mile of the coast.

Dundy's eyes swept the foliage silently. The ground had sloped gradually to a small hillock, with the river perhaps four or five feet below them. It was an admirable location for a camp, and the thought was voiced by Dundy as the lieutenant stepped over to his side.

"I don't know how you feel about it, Mr. Sterling, but it seems to me that we can do no better than spend the night here, and carry our search

farther inland in the morning. Of course, we could put in another couple of hours, but we would run the risk of being hard put to it for shelter, if we wait until dusk to find a camp, and besides——," Dundy paused significantly and tapped the barrel of his rifle—"we've got to face the fact that we are in the enemy's lines, and the kind of an enemy that is a whole lot more at home in the dark than we are. I doubt if we could find a better place for defence, if it comes to that, if we searched three miles."

Sterling nodded. "Then suppose we call the day's march done, and bunk here. I can tell you right now, gentlemen, that a cup of coffee would look mighty good to me, and if I had some bacon to go with it, crisp and brown, you know, I could watch the moon come up over the river with real enjoyment, in spite of our friend, Mr. Bulger."

And this was almost the picture that might have been seen as the next two hours changed the dying rays of the sun to the swift, gray Panamanian twilight in the little clearing. Almost in the center, a cheery camp fire crackled and snapped and every now and then sent a shower of yellow sparks dancing out into the shadows. Rod was surprised to find that its cheery warmth was not at all oppressive in spite of the heat of the day. In fact, as darkness began to follow, a cool breeze rippled the surface of the river and

blew through the nodding trees like the strong current of a huge electric fan on a summer noon. Beyond the glow of the fire, the shadows formed in an increasing mass, shrouding the foliage until the bushes looked like strange, fantastic ghosts. Off in the distance, over the winding shores of the Chagres, a great, yellow, blinking ball began to thrust its rim, slowly and hesitatingly at first as though reconnoitering the situation, and then as though gathering confidence, it suddenly lifted itself full above the line of trees and poured a strong, steady beam down into the waters. It was the moon, a wonderful, dazzling, enchanting moon, changing the frowning fringe of underbrush and rustling trees to all sorts of bewildering forms until the jungle suggested the realm of fairyland. To Rod, it was a strange moon that he had never met before, bearing as little resemblance to the moon he had known at home as the slender palms of the Chagres did to the stately elms of Cambridge. The abrupt question of Dundy, as he lowered a fresh log onto the smouldering embers of the fire, brought the boy back sharply from the realm of fancy to the unpleasant realities of fact.

"Shall we post a guard tonight, Lieutenant?"

Sterling turned his wandering gaze from the river and shifted his position nearer to the fire.

"It would be the height of foolishness not to.

I'm not going to be caught napping, if I can help myself!"

"Then suppose Brady and I take the last half of the night, and leave you and Standish the first half?"

"That is giving you the hardest watch," said the lieutenant with a smile. "But as long as you have suggested it, we'll let the arrangement stand. I'll let Standish have first duty. Then he can call me at twelve, and I'll wake you at two o'clock. That will give us each a couple of hours apiece. If Bulger shows his hand, he'll have to reckon with the sentry first. But it's too early yet to turn in. How about that stock of stories of yours, Dundy?"

"By the way, Sterling," said Rod as the blaze of the camp fire sank to a steady glow, "you said last night that dynamite is a big word in Panama. What did you mean?"

The lieutenant grinned as he jerked his hand toward Dundy's reclining figure. "You are better qualified to answer that question than I am. Your note book ought to be crowded with some lively reminiscences on that subject. Weren't you one of the men at the Cultbra Cut last week whom the Jamaican negro nearly sent into eternity with his keg of dynamite?"

Dundy knocked the ashes of his pipe out onto the ground and slowly refilled and lighted it be-

fore he replied in the musing tone of the camp-fire story teller, "Yes, dynamite *is* a big force in Panama. We burn up nearly seventeen hundred pounds of it every hour in the working day; nearly a ton every sixty minutes; enough to blow up a good-sized city, I guess, if applied in the right place. Speaking of the Culabra Cut, Lieutenant, I will confess that little incident you mentioned gave me two of the most uncomfortable minutes I have ever spent. I wouldn't have given much for Jack Dundy's chances of eating his dinner that day when that particular dark-skinned gentleman you refer to set his red keg down on the track and—but I guess I am beginning in the middle of my story!

"To start at the beginning, a group of us were watching the air-drillers making ready for a giant blast, one of those kind that break the windows a mile away. We had just turned to run for it when someone saw a shuffling West Indian negro coming down the track in the opposite direction, carrying a fifty-pound keg of dynamite on his shoulder that he had been sent to the supply house for. Of course, we yelled to him and waved our hands and dashed around like mad men to warn him of his danger, but he kept on with his head bent and his eyes on the ground as though all the cares of the world were on his shoulders. By this time we were putting as much

distance as we could between ourselves and the sputtering fuse, creeping along the red clay like the eye of a venomous snake advancing on its prey. For a moment we hoped that the air-drillers had done their work in too much of a hurry and that the fuse would burn itself out before it reached the dynamite. But a second glance showed us that the hope was futile. Another minute, or at the outside a minute and a half, and the blast would explode with a power which we knew would shake the earth like a volcano. And now to our amazement, the negro's dragging steps ceased. He glanced about him in a dazed, sleepy fashion, and deliberately placing his keg of powder on the track, sat down on it with the air of a man preparing to enjoy a much-needed rest. Again we raised our voices to warn him of his danger, but we might as well have saved our strength. The negro pulled out a frayed cotton handkerchief from his shirt and calmly proceeded to rub the perspiration from his forehead, yawning as though he could scarcely keep himself awake.

"It was at this instant that a new aspect of the situation struck us like a dash of cold water. While the dynamite to be exploded was many times as great as the amount contained in the negro's keg, yet it was buried in the earth in such a manner that its force would be expended down-

ward, and with the exception of the flying earth and stones which it would dislodge, would place us in no very serious danger. On the other hand, we realized that if the colored man's keg was exploded at the same time, we would receive its full strength and would be fortunate if any of our number escaped to tell the story. You may be sure that it was with bated breath that we kept our eyes riveted on the drowsy Jamaican who held all of our lives in the palm of his hand, stolidly unconscious of the fact.

"Suddenly there was a muffled, convulsive roar as of the discharge of a long lien of artillery, and then we threw ourselves flat on our faces, digging our fingers into the clay, the air was filled with a dense cloud of earth and gravel, obscuring even the burning rays of the sun. The dynamite blast had exploded!

"What happened afterwards I can't tell you from my own observation, but as I gathered the story afterward, a broken piece of granite was sent hurtling through the air directly toward the head of the black man, who had bounded to his feet with a wild cry of alarm. Before he could move, a stone struck him squarely between the eyes, crushing his head like an egg shell, and he toppled to the ground in a lifeless heap with the blood-stained boulder falling at his side. Had the rock swerved an inch in its flight or had it

failed to meet the human skull that checked it, the keg of dynamite would have been instantly exploded and——" Dundy thrust his toe toward a blazing fagot from the fire that had fallen to the side, and thoughtfully kicked it back into its proper place—"Well, I guess. you would have been hearing this little story from somebody besides Jack Dundy!" he finished grimly.

"That's a good yarn, Dundy," said Sterling, "and the most curious part of it all is that it is a fact. It reminds me of another dynamite story that a railroad man was telling me the other day. Mind you, though, I don't vouch for the accuracy, so if it seems far-fetched—"

"Oh, you've apologized enough," broke in Rod, "Let's have the story!"

"It went somewhat like this," continued the lieutenant with a grin. "Some of the dynamite blasts at Culebra, Standish, send pieces of rock a mile and more from the scene of the explosion. It is nothing unusual for a territory completely removed from the blast, perhaps far out of sound of it, to receive a dislodged boulder, apparently plunging downward from a clear sky. This is what happened to the railroad man. He was walking the tracks about a half a mile beyond Culebra when a sudden desire seized him to smoke. He paused and fumbled for his pipe and tobacco. As he struck a match, a heavy object

crashed to the ground just ahead of him, and he saw a four-inch boulder splintering the very tie one which his foot would have been resting had he not stopped to fill his pipe. The rock had been hurled all the way from the Culabra Cut!"

"That *is* rather far-fetched, Lieutenant," commented Brady doubtfully. "I would have had to be with that brakeman and seen the rock fall with my own eyes to believe *that* tale!"

"It's no worse than some of the stories I have heard you tell!" said Dundy slyly.

Brady bristled. "Well, you can bank on it that I don't tell any Manchausen yarns such as I have known you to do!"

"Well," said Sterling, "it's time to turn in. Standish, I guess it's your turn at guard. Call me at midnight. For my part, I don't think I will have the slightest difficulty in going to sleep."

The night dragged by without incident. Rod nudged Sterling shortly after twelve o'clock, and when he took the vacant blanket by his side, was so wakeful in spite of his vigil that he half-regretted calling the lieutenant. But Sterling said that Standish was asleep in less than ten minutes.

Twice during the night, Rod opened his eyes, staring about him with a strange sense of unreality as he saw the fringe of dim, ghostly trees and far overhead the dull gray sky with its handful of twinkling stars. On the first occasion,

it was Dundy's watch, and Rod saw his tall form pacing slowly back and forth by the edge of the river. The second time he awakened, Dundy had been succeeded by Brady on picket-duty, and morning was already beginning to break through the jungle.

The youth fell asleep again, however, almost immediately. It was perhaps two hours later that a harsh rasping voice brought him, yawning, to his elbow. For a moment, Rod rubbed his eyes in bewilderment. The camp scene had undergone a sudden and startling change.

At the edge of the trees, stood three men with levelled revolvers, glancing over the frowning barrels of their weapons with a mocking grin as Sterling bounded to his feet with a hoarse cry. Two of the new-comers were strangers, but it needed only an instant's glance to reveal in the leader the powerful form and flushed face of "Big Bill" Bulger. Brady's riffle had dropped to the ground, and he stood with his arm awkwardly raised above his head and the sullen, sheepish expression of a boy who is being publicly whipped. Evidently the enemy had surrounded him before he could draw a trigger.

Bulger took a quick, short step forward, with the same sneering glance which Rod had seen in his eyes during their encounter at Colon.

"Gentlemen, you are my prisoners! And I

give you notice, Lieutenant Sterling, that the sooner you get that West Point bluster out of your system the better! See?"

CHAPTER XVI.

Prisoners.

TO Rod's dazed senses, the scene appeared more like the tag end of a terrible dream than a reality. He sat staring stupidly at the circle of faces around him, Bulger's sneering and triumphant; Brady's still sheepish, crestfallen; Sterling's flushed with a helpless anger. the more intense as no one realized better than he its helplessness. Dundy stood close to the newly replenished fire, with a wooden, stoical expression which gave no hint of his real feelings. Apparently he was the most collected member of the strange group.

Bulger was the first to break the silence. "I presume that you find the situation slightly embarrassing, gentlemen, and I am even afraid you may find it more so." He paused with a sudden hardening of his expression. "We may as well drop all pretense, and face cold, hard facts. I warned you at Colon, Mr. Sterling, that this jungle was a dangerous place for young men who persisted in meddling with other people's affairs! You laughed at me then, but I don't think you will do very much laughing now!"

"Say what you have to say, Bulger, and get it over with!" Sterling burst out passionately.

"Oh! So my bantam young lieutenant is getting angry! Let me tell you right now, Mr. Sterling, that I will finish my few remarks in my own way, and if you don't listen peaceably and politely——"

"Let him go ahead, Sterling," said Rod in a low tone. "He is only trying to taunt you into a fight!"

Soft as the words were, Bulger's keen ears heard them, and he scowled at the youth as he changed his revolver to his left hand and motioned his two companions to close in on the prisoners.

"Drop your guns, all of you!" he ordered, raising his voice. "Dick, you go through their clothes while Bob and I keep them covered. And you'll need your eyes in that piece of work, let me tell you. Next to myself, Jack Dundy is the slipperiest man in Panama!"

"Thank you for the compliment," grinned Dundy, as he unbuckled his belt. "Only I would appreciate it more if you hadn't compared me to yourself, Mr. Bulger!"

The weapons of the quartet made a rather formidable looking stack when Dick, a slouching, rat-eyed man, with a face like a badly worn piece of leather, had finished his task, and stepped back

to Bulger's side. Bulger surveyed the revolvers and rifles with a sigh of satisfaction. Although he lowered his own weapon, however, his finger still hovered restlessly near the trigger. It was plain that he wasn't disposed to take any chances in spite of his mastery of the situation.

Stationing one of his men on either side of the clearing, he slowly seated himself on a fallen limb and for a moment sat silently studying his prisoners, with his revolver poised on his knees.

"You may be wondering, Mr. Sterling, why I followed you from Colon and why I was so rude as to interrupt your morning slumbers," he began. "The fact of the matter is that I want a heart to heart conversation with you gentlemen, a private conversation, and this is the first satisfactory opportunity I have had."

Sterling stared at the speaker with an expression of puzzled bewilderment, but remembering Rod's injunction, he closed his lips and waited for Bulger to continue.

"What I have to say," the other continued, "I don't imagine will need much thought for you to digest. When I planned this little affair last night, I was afraid that I would have to put you to very serious inconvenience—in fact, that I would be under the painful necessity of sending you some twenty miles back into the jungle and placing you in confinement for the next two

weeks in a native cabin, which you would not find either clean or pleasant. And as I have no house-keeper, you would have to accept your accommodations as you found them. You will admit that such a prospect is hardly alluring, eh, Lieutenant? A second course has occurred to me, which it is possible you will find more to your liking."

Bulger toyed gently with the muzzle of his weapon. "It is absolutely necessary for my purposes that I be left undisturbed in this little corner of Panama for the period of a week, perhaps ten days. You see, I am frank with you, and I shall insist that you be so with me. The second course open to me, and of course to you, is that you proceed immediately back to Culebra under the escort of two of my men, and that you give me your words of honor to——"

"What?" asked Rod involuntarily.

"To keep silent in regard to our meeting, and to report that my description to Colonel Goethals of the condition of the French dredges is true!"

Bulger rose from the tree, and stood gazing musingly at the quartet as he finished. His companions could not have maintained a more stolid expression of indifference if he had been speaking in a foreign tongue. Rod's glance shifted to the lieutenant. Sterling was sitting cross-

legged on the ground, with his eyes scowling into his lap. Dundy and Brady were plainly waiting for him to speak. A curious smile was beginning to form around the mouth of the former.

The Lieutenant glanced up sharply. "On the whole, I am rather obliged to you, Mr. Bulger. To tell the truth, I was almost ready to own up that you had been telling a straight story, and that those dredges we stumbled across yesterday were all that you had in mind. Now I can see what a tremendous mistake I came very nearly making, and that you are really trying to swindle the American government! I am very glad, indeed, that you have put me right as to your little plans!"

Bulger's brow contracted in such a sudden scowl that for a second, Rod fancied the lieutenant was going to feel the force of his brawny fist. But Sterling's eyes never flickered.

"Then you refuse my alternative?" Bulger snapped grimly.

"I fail to see where you have given me an alternative. I am a soldier, Bulger. You don't know what that means. You couldn't understand it even if I explained it to you. Honesty, and all that, is as strange to you as Greek. But as long as I wear the American uniform, I don't intend to soil it, and if I didn't wear it and still called myself an American, I would rather rot as your

prisoner than disgrace my flag! I'm not much on fine speeches, and this question doesn't need them. I'm young in the game, but I'm old enough to play square, and I intend to do so!"

"Good boy, Sterling!" cried Rod impetuously. "That's the best speech I ever heard in my life!"

"Rot!" said Bulger contemptuously. "Well, Dundy, you're neither a tin-soldier nor a milk-sop. Are you and Brady going to sit still and be dictated to in this way?"

Dundy raised his eyes from the fire and his lips set in a grim, straight line.

"I am under the orders of Lieutenant Sterling, and proud of it! I reckon you'll have to make ready that little cabin of yours, Bulger!"

Bulger swung on his heel and motioned to his men to advance into the clearing. They obeyed with a cautiousness that would have been amusing to the prisoners under other circumstances, but just now they were too deeply immersed in their own problem to appreciate any suggestion of humor.

"Line up, single file!" Bulger ordered curtly, "You, young man," nodding to Rod, "in the lead, and Dundy second. I guess, Lieutenant, we'll have to put you last. Fall in now, and be lively about it!"

"Shall we tie them?" asked Dick doubtfully.

"Tie them?" asked Bulger, "In this jungle?

We wouldn't be able to take them a quarter of a mile without dragging them if we didn't leave them their hands. No, we've got something better than a rope, and that's cold steel! The first hint at escape, men, bang away! Don't stand on ceremony. Shoot first, and take any explanations afterward. I suppose this sounds a whole lot like 'Wild West,' but you'll think you've run up against something worse than greasers or Apaches if you forget these instructions of mine! Dick, you lead the way, and Bob and I will fall in behind. We've got a seven or eight hours' tramp ahead of us, and the sooner we start, the sooner we'll finish. If you begin to tire before we are through, lieutenant, you can thank yourself. Are you all ready, Dick? Forward, then—march!"

Rod darted a last glance around the clearing, —the smoldering embers of the fire, the rumpled grass, the soft, gray-blue line of the river. It all seemed so calm and peaceful, like the picture painted in a beautiful verse of poetry. Bulger and his men might have been a trio of evil spirits, summoned from the fastnesses of the jungle to shatter the charm of the scene. Somehow, even the events of the day before and the lounging camp-fire chat of the past evening seemed vague and far away, and as he stumbled through the first line of the foliage, Rod felt as though an

age had elapsed since the mud huts of Gatun had dropped from their view.

The long, hot, dry march of that day was an ordeal never to be forgotten. Once, shortly past noon, a brief halt was made and a hasty lunch eaten. But the party was on their way again in less than half an hour. Bulger was restless and clearly impatient to reach the journey's end, where he could watch his prisoners more securely. During the noon-halt he hardly uttered a word, eating his meal in a surly silence, with one eye on the four captives and the other on the thick wedges of bread and cold bacon, which Dick produced from a greasy haversack.

This silence was shared by the other members of the strange party. Dundy and Brady seemed to accept their fate with a more or less stoical indifference, and the philosophy born of long contact with danger, but Sterling chafed fitfully and was only prevented from an open dash for freedom by the sight of Bulger's restless weapon.

It was late in the afternoon when the heavy underbrush opened suddenly onto a broad, flat clearing, perhaps a quarter of a mile in length. Almost directly in its center was a group of three mud and bamboo huts, while the ground in the immediate vicinity gave evidence of a rude attempt at cultivation. The quickened steps of

Bulger and his men were enough to show the prisoners that their day's tramp was finished. Their course had led away from the river almost in a right angle, although to Dundy's experienced eye it was apparent that they had been gradually approaching the coast. In the deep tangle of trees, however, there was no way of telling whether the ocean was ten rods or a mile away, and even when they emerged on the clearing, there was nothing visible on the other side except the same monotonous fringe of palm trees and foliage.

There was a rough shout of greeting from the huts as they approached, and an unkempt white man appeared from a doorway with a clay pipe in his mouth and his hand shading his eyes. At his heels was an equally unkempt woman, wiping her hands across a tattered blue apron. Bulger strode on ahead of the party and drew the man aside in a low, animated conversation, while the woman stood back against the corner of one of the cabins, surveying the prisoners with an unpleasant scowl.

Bulger finished his discussion abruptly and jerked his hand toward the nearest hut.

"Put the men in there, Dick, for the present, and leave Bob on guard in the door. I want a long talk with you and Benson here. I've got to start back in another hour. Don't you think you

can get me something to eat, Susy?" Bulger broke off, adressing the woman as the prisoners were roughly directed toward the cabin that was to serve as their lodging-place. "I'm as hungry as a Chagres alligator!"

It was not an inviting prospect that greeted Rod's eyes as he stumbled across the threshold of the hut. The one narrow slit in the walls which served as a window was located up under the eaves, higher even than Brady's head, and the interior of the cabin consequently was in an almost perpetual twilight. This was quite sufficient, however, to show a hard red clay floor, with a pair of ragged blankets in one corner, and a rough stool, without a back, in the opposite corner. There was no hint of other furniture.

Dick waited until Sterling had entered. Then he carefully opened and closed the door two or three times and glanced at the hinges and bolt to make sure that it was in serviceable condition. Rod noticed that the bolt was on the outside and that the door was composed of heavy timbers. Evidently the cabin had either been used as a store-house or a prison before, perhaps both.

The man, Bob, took Dick's place as Bulger's voice was heard impatiently calling him. Bob dropped the stock of his musket on the ground and coolly reached over and took possession of the solitary stool, which he proceeded to place

just outside the door in such a position that he could command a clear view within. Then he drew a deep sigh and lighted his pipe with the air of a man who regards himself as an assured master of the situation.

"I say," Rod began, stepping over to him, "Can't we have some water? I'm almost parched."

Bob gazed at the youth a moment in silence as he thoughtfully sucked at his pipe. Then he raised his voice and called over to the woman, who had already started preparations for a meal. A few minutes later she reappeared with a bucket and a gourd.

"Thank you!" Rod said gratefully, and then he added impulsively, "I don't believe you're half as bad a chap as you pretend to be!"

Bob stared at him in amazement, and then a sly grin spread over his face. "You might as well stow that 'con' talk now, pardner! It won't work. I'm too old a dog to be caught with that sort of mush. You go back in that corner and keep still! The first man that comes within three feet of this door is going to get a bullet!"

Bulger's sneering face appeared at his shoulder as he finished. Had the last two sentences been added for his benefit or theirs?

Bulger did not linger. With a sharp glance around the hut, he stepped across to the opposite

cabin where his supper was being prepared, and the prisoners were left alone, with the exception of the guard in the door-way.

Dundy threw himself on the floor with an exclamation of disgust. "If I ever get out of this and meet 'Big Bill' face to face, I tell you, gentlemen, we'll have a stiff account to settle!"

Sterling grunted. "That little word 'if' is a rather steep barrier, Dundy!"

"Perhaps—but we have won out over a whole lot worse obstacles in our day, eh Brady?"

Brady dug his hands glumly into his pockets. "The thing that cuts me, Jack, is the fact that I'm responsible for the whole mess! I haven't said anything about it before, because I haven't had the chance, but you know as well as I do that if I had been doing the right kind of sentry duty we wouldn't have been taken like rats in a trap! It's the first time that any man has been able to say that he took Bob Brady napping, and it's a tough pill to swallow. Can it be, Dundy, that I'm getting too old for the game?"

"If I ever hear any more of that kind of talk from you, Brady, we part company as pals! That's the worst nonsense I ever heard a sane man utter. Do you know what would have happened if you had shown fight when Bulger had the drop on you? You would have had a two or three inch bullet hole in you, and we would have

been taken just the same, with one less able-bodied man to help us fight our way out!"

"That's all well enough, Jack," rejoined Brady disconsolately. "If I could see any likelihood of righting matters, maybe I could look at it as you do. But with three men on guard, with a whole arsenal if they need it, what chance have we got without even a jack-knife?"

Dundy shook his head. "It *does* look black, I will admit, old fellow."

Sterling turned from a moody contemplation of the rough mud walls. "What do you imagine Bulger is going to do when he gets back to the river? I have been trying to answer that question all day."

Dundy leaned back against a corner, and folded his arms over his knees. "He *might* do several things, but I think I can guess the principal problem on his mind. We know now, if we didn't before, that our suspicions about those dredges are true. Bulger has probably found a stack of valuable machinery, and I wouldn't be surprised if he hadn't found a market for it, too. But he'll have to get it out of the country, and he'll have to do it in the next few days before a search party takes our trail. The only way he can do so, of course, is by water. He will probably charter a boat, if he can't steal one, and tow it up the river to the point where the dredges are

located, and take them on board at night. He's running a big chance on getting out to sea before he is stopped, but Bulger is used to chances, and besides it's his only way of getting off with his spoils. We'll be kept here until he's either arrested or safe out of the country, unless——"

"Unless what?" asked Rod as Dundy paused.

The police officer turned his head significantly toward the door with his hand to his lips.

"Did you ever read the story of that French writer who said there are twenty-nine different ways of escape from prison?" Dundy asked abruptly. "Well, if we can't find one of these twenty-nine, we deserve to stay here until this little old hut falls to pieces!"

There was a quick step outside the door almost before Dundy finished his low-voiced sentence, and Bulger peered over the shoulder of the guard at the group within. He was evidently in a good humor, perhaps due to the steaming cup of coffee from his evening meal, which he still held in his hand.

"I've come to tell you good-bye, gentlemen," he began with a grin, "and to caution you not to offend the men that I am leaving to keep you company. They are rather sensitive, and not at all good-natured, and I very much fear they would make things unpleasant for you, if you should cross them, eh, Dick?"

Bulger stepped back and picked up his rifle. "I don't know when or where I will have the pleasure of seeing you again, but until then, 'au revoir' as the French say! Did I get that right, lieutenant?"

With a jaunty wave of his hand, and a long, gliding stride which seemed to feel no fatigue, Bulger vanished in the direction of the jungle.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Flight Through the Night.

SUPPER was brought in to the fugitives shortly afterward. It was a rude meal of salt pork and corn bread, and half a dozen cocanuts. These were carefully opened on the outside as though their captors feared even to trust them with a knife. Bulger's party now consisted of four members—Dick, Bob, the man Benson, and the woman. Bob relieved Dick on guard while the latter slouched across to the other cabin to eat his meal. Benson and his wife were not visible, although from frequent loud-voiced altercations it was evident that they were not far away.

The prisoners did full justice to their scanty fare in spite of the homeliness of the viands and the absence of knives or forks. Corn bread without butter is not an epicurean dish, and thick slices of salt pork, held between finger and thumb, do not add either to one's table manners or appetite, but the fresh milk of the cocanuts did much to atone for the other discomforts, and

when Rod set down his last husk, he breathed the first real sigh of satisfaction since he had been led into the stuffy hut.

"If I had a chance to stretch my legs now and get a breath of fresh air," he said longingly, "I believe I could digest my supper with satisfaction!"

"You have as much chance of gratifying your desires as I have of filling my tobacco pouch," responded Dundy grimly, as he packed his last pipe with a methodical care, in order to save every speck of brown dust which his dingy leather bag could shake out. "I guess we'll have to be content to confine ourselves to these four walls whether our digestive apparatus suffers or not!"

The evening came on suddenly, as the darkness does in the tropics. Almost before the captives realized the fact, the gray twilight had deepened to heavy shadows, and save for the glow of Bob's pipe as he sat on the stool in the doorway with his legs indolently crossed, there was nothing to break the blackness outside.

Brady was the first to repose himself for the night. Slipping his coat under his head, he thumped it into a semblance of a pillow, and selecting the point nearest the door, he turned on his side and signified by his actions, if not his words, that he was going to forget the fatigue

of the day and the worry of their situation. An ordinary man would have found hard work in going to sleep under such conditions, but Brady had bunked in the clay of the Central American jungles too often, with his face and neck plastered with mud to keep away the mosquitoes, to be bothered by petty discomforts. In an incredibly short time, a deep, regular snore from his corner showed that his attempt to woo slumber had been successful.

Rod sat propped up against the wall long after his companions had followed Brady's example. He saw Bob's bulky form changed by Benson's long, lank figure, and judged that it must be nearly midnight.

Outside, the scene was strangely silent. Across the narrow path, the youth could see the squat outlines of the second cabin, like a deep smudge in the night, but except for the irregular breathing of his companions and an occasional impatient exclamation from Benson as he changed his restless position, no sound broke the stillness.

Rod's thoughts were curiously alert and wide awake. Almost forgotten scenes in his life at Boston "Tech" came back to him with startling distinctness. He wondered vaguely what Jack Winters was doing, and recollected with a sudden start that the college was probably in the full

excitement of preparations for the annual Thanksgiving football game. Then the kaleidescope of his memory shifted, and the scenes of the voyage down to Panama unrolled before him. The sweet, winsome face of Edith Arnold came before him, and he speculated as to her recovery from the siege of fever. The "Eitel Frederick" by this time was probably beating up the Central American coast on her return voyage to Colon. The over-bearing countenance of Wingrave Sutton followed Edith Arnold's, and Rod involuntarily clenched his hands at the remembrance of the young Englishman's arrogance. Sutton had undoubtedly resumed his desk at the British consulate office in the city of Panama before now. Would their paths ever cross again?

The youth came to himself with a start. Somewhere outside, far off among the trees, an animal howled mournfully. Benson roused himself from his chair, and walked slowly back and forth before the open door, but Rod noticed that he took good care to keep the interior of the cabin well in view. Evidently Bulger's hirelings had a wholesome fear of his anger. Rod mechanically braced himself back against the wall and crouched forward on his hands and knees.

Three bounds, and he could clear the doorway. Ten seconds, and he would be away in the

darkness, with the night to swallow him. Even if Benson saw his form in time to fire, the chances were that in the confusion, the bullet would go wild. The boy's nerves tightened, and he felt his knees stiffen as they used to do on the starting line of a hundred yard dash. Then, like a wave of cold water, his common sense came suddenly back to him and he sank down onto the floor, his hands all of a tingle after his excitement. Even granting that he could dash past Benson's careless musket, what? He would find himself in the heart of an unknown jungle at midnight, not knowing which point of the compass meant safety—and his friends would be left behind. Of what use would he be to them, or they to him? It was not an impulsive boy's dash for freedom that would aid them, but a man's patience.

Rod stretched cautiously out against the thatched wall and closed his eyes. When he awoke, the sun was sending a burning, dancing ray of yellow light through the open door, and his friends were already sitting up.

Another day and night dragged by. The prisoners were marched from the cramped hut twice for a breathing spell of fifteen minutes each, under the guns of their captors. In fact, had it not been for these short reliefs from the heat of their squalid prison, it is doubtful if they

could have borne up under the oppressive humidity which in the vicinity of noon-day was rendered almost suffocating under the thick walls. The man, Benson, hardly exchanged a word with them, but Dick and Bob thawed visibly as the hours progressed, even condescending to exchange a joke with Dundy and Brady, although their hands never strayed from their belts. Once when Sterling jumped suddenly from the floor, Dick's weapon was covering him full in the face, before he had taken a step. Apparently there was not the slightest chance of taking their captors by surprise.

Sterling chafed impatiently. The picture of what Bulger was probably accomplishing at the river while he was a helpless prisoner, powerless to block him, goaded his impulsive spirit until after a fiery outbreak of his pent-up feelings, he subsided into a moody and depressed silence, from which he could only be aroused in curt monosyllables.

It was on the evening of the third day that Dundy suddenly dropped the cocanut he was holding to his lips with a low exclamation. His tone was so different from the listless conversation of the day that both Rod and the lieutenant glanced toward him curiously.

The police officer deposited his husk on the ground, drew his sleeve across his mouth, and

announced in a low, impressive tone after a flitting glance at the door, "Do you recall that observation of mine regarding the Frenchman's twenty-nine ways of escape from prison?"

Sterling nodded, with a return of his former gloominess. "But that was in a book, Dundy, and unfortunately we are dealing with real life just now!"

"Just the same, I believe that I have found one of those methods which will our case exactly!"

Sterling sprang to his feet. "What is it?"

"Patience, lieutenant, patience."

"It looks to me as though we have had altogether too much of patience."

"Do you remember that it took Monte Christo over seven years to bore out of his dungeon?"

"And do *you* remember that in about seven days, Mr. Bulger will be so far out at sea with those dredges that we can't stop him?"

"Well, we can't do any good if we are going to be trussed up by the heels here! And we certainly will be if if we make a false step now and give those lynx-eyed guardians of ours a hint of what is in our minds. Do you realize why I have been trying to cultivate their friendship?"

"No, I can't say that I do," answered Sterling disconsolately. "It has seemed a good deal like a waste of time to me. Those men would kill us all for fifty dollars apiece!"

"And I don't intend that they shall make the effort. Do you appreciate the act that our guards are less watchful this evening than they were thirty-six hours ago, that they are a hundred per cent. more friendly than they would have dreamed of being when they pushed us like so many helpless kittens into this hovel? Can't you see how we can turn this friendliness to our account?"

"Bribery?"

"No, sir! Bulger could out-bid any offer we could make, and those men know it! No, I have a better plan than that. You watch Dick Dundy perform one of his renowned tricks of magic, the wonder of two continents, gentlemen, and tell me afterward how the trick is done—if you can!"

"What are you going to do?"

"Wait and see! I don't know that I am going to do anything yet. If you wish further information, consult my French friend who has invented the twenty-nine different ways out of prison!"

Dundy sank back into his corner and closed his eyes and his ears. The queries of the others might have fallen upon a stone man. The police officer refused steadfastly to speak for the space of more than half an hour. When he finally arose to his feet and yawningly stretched his arms, it was well past seven o'clock, and the

guard had just been changed. It was the man, Benson, who lolled before the open door now.

Dundy stepped quickly across the hut. The man whirled as though he had been set on a pivot, and his little eyes gleamed as his finger stole near the trigger of his musket.

"Stand back!" he ordered imperiously.

Dundy came to a pause in the center of the room, and raised his hands above his head while a peculiar glazed look crept into his eyes. His friends glanced toward him in alarm. The next moment, the police officer uttered a loud shriek, waved his hands frantically in the air, and before any one could spring forward to his assistance, fell full-length on the hard red clay, frothing at the mouth.

For an instant, the guard stood gaping as though he had been bereft of movement.

"The man is ill, dying!" Rod cried excitedly, springing to his side and raising his head. "He is overcome with the heat. Water, quick! Do you want him to die before your eyes?"

Benson hesitated only an instant. Then with a quick cry to his companions, he dropped his gun and sprang toward the prostrate form within. Dundy showed no signs of life. His body had grown suddenly stiff and rigid. He lay like a person in a trance, hardly breathing.

Benson bent over him awkwardly, pushing

aside his shirt to feel his heart, and calling loudly for help. Suddenly, a pair of vise-like arms shot up from the floor, the man was hurled downward with a force which drove the breath from his body, and Dundy bounded to his feet with a chuckle!

"Someone make sure of his gun, while I hold him!" he jerked out. "The others will be here in a minute! Oh, you would, would you?"

This last was addresed to the man on the floor, who began to kick and struggle like a maniac. Dundy's knee, however, was like the end of an iron rod. The other's struggles gradually relaxed, and a sullen expression of surrender crept over his flushed features.

"If you fought fair, like a white man," he snapped, "I would have been on top of you!"

"All's fair in love and war!" rejoined Dundy almost gaily. "Who's got that gun? You, Brady? Now, cover the first man that enters that door. I am going to tie up our friend here so that even his own grandmother wouldn't know him!"

"Aren't you sick at all?" Rod asked, as the police officer deftly unfastened his belt and crossed his prisoner's hands.

Dundy chuckled. "Ill? Do I look like a sick man? No, I was merely putting into execution one of those suggestions which that quick-witted Frenchman gave me for a short-cut out

of jail. Do you recall Monte Christo's ruse? He pretended to be *drowned,* and they threw him into the sea on the supposition that he was a dead man. Well, I borrowed Monte Christo's little ruse—only I wasn't as nearly dead as he was! But here they come! Get ready, boys! They will see our dodge in another minute."

He was right. Through the door Jack came bounding, with his sallow face flushed with excitement and exertion, and close behind him pounded Bob. As the first passed the threshold, the hands of Brady descended on his shoulders like the two arms of a monster hook, and he was whirled from his feet and jerked across to the opposite corner like a bale of hay. Bob brought up short at the door, blinked in bewilderment, as half-blinded by the uncertain light, he stared stupidly before him. Sterling thrust the gun he had snatched from the floor under his nose, and the man's hands flew up as though released by a spring.

He stepped back, with the lieutenant following him, the barrel of the weapon bobbing up and down in front of his nose.

"In there!" Sterling snapped. "I will give you just one-fifteenth of a second to dodge into that door-way. If you are not inside when that time is up, this trigger will give you the kind of an emphasis that won't be pleasant!"

The emphasis wasn't needed. Bob was within the hut before the lieutenant had finished speaking. The scene had undergone an astonishing change, even in a space of something less than two minutes. Both Dick and Benson were fastened securely with borrowed belts, and lying flat on their backs, with their eyes staring above them in a kind of sodden wonder, as though they were not quite certain just what had occurred. Dundy grasped Bob by the shoulder, and ordered the lieutenant to hold his hands while he sought the proper fastening. For the moment, Dundy had assumed command of the situation.

Rod was busy unfastening his own belt, a narrow, black leather affair, and tossed it over to the officer while he was speaking. Dundy surveyed it critically, and deftly wound it around his prisoner's body, with his hands pressed flat against his sides. When he had finished his operation, Bob was as helpless as his two companions. The three were carefully pushed over to the farthest corner of the hut and the fugitives swept a swift, searching glance outside. Susie was still busy about her evening meal. Evidently the brief sounds of the scuffle had not disturbed her. Dundy stole softly outside and beckoned the others to follow him. It was already gray dusk, and the fringe of the jungle was softened in the mysterious twilight.

They still retained the weapons of their former captors, but as they glanced into the third of the three huts, Rod could hardly repress a cry of elation when he saw their own guns stacked in the corner. They were snatched up with the enthusiasm and swiftness with which an old friend is greeted. When the quartet stepped quietly back into the path, Susie had moved over to the door of her hut and stood peering out into the night, with her hands to her eyes. Evidently the unusual quiet was beginning to alarm her.

"This way!" Dundy called in a low tone over his shoulder as he dashed swiftly away toward the vague, shadowy outline of the trees. "We can't expect more than ten minutes' start at best!"

"Two minutes ought to be enough in a night like this!" Brady grunted.

Sterling tripped over a projecting root, fell headlong, and picked himself up, bruised and grimed. But he did not pause. Already the uproar in the huts was beginning to make itself heard like the sharp yelping of a pack of angry dogs, trying to break their chains. It was easy to imagine that Susie was trying to untie the knots which bound the men.

"She'll not have an easy task—I don't think!" Dundy panted as the party reached the foliage and came to a panting halt in an effort to shake

the cob-webs from their brains and gain a more accurate idea of direction. "I served two years as a sailor in my younger days, and I learned to tie a knot scientifically!"

"Which is the shortest course to the Chagres?" Sterling asked as he tried to fathom the thick darkness ahead. "It doesn't look to me as though we could make a mile an hour through this underbrush."

"We can't, without a light!" responded Dundy gloomily. "If we had any kind of a guide at all, we could reach the river by morning. But I am afraid we'll have to give it up, and camp somewhere until we have light to go by."

"If that is all you need, we can start at once, Mr. Dundy!" It was Rod who spoke, and as the police officer stared in his direction, a sudden yellow ray shot out, and swept the little circle like a miniature beacon, revolving on an axle.

"Jumping bull-frogs, Standish! Can it be that you have found your electric flash-light?" cried Sterling excitedly.

"That is just what I have done. I saw it in the cabin where we stumbled on our guns. Evidently Bulger's men didn't know its use, and thought it was only a toy!"

"Well, it's our salvation!" said Dundy emphatically. "Give me a light like that, and I'll resign from the Canal Police force if I can't get

you to the Chagres by morning. How long will the power last?" he added anxiously.

"It is guaranteed to give a steady light for five hours, and I haven't used it since I had it recharged in Boston. If you save it back, and only use it when we are stalled, it will last the night through easily. Great Scott! They're coming, Dundy! Don't you hear them?"

There was no need to ask the question. The babel of shouts and curses behind them abruptly swelled to a hoarse, angry roar, and the fugitives could hear the sound of running feet and bellowed orders. Dundy turned toward the trees and swept Rod's flash-light into the dark mass of underbrush.

"Are you ready, boys? I'll warn you in advance, we have a hard struggle before us. It's going to be a fight to plow through these thickets in the dark, but we can win if you can hold up! Keep together and remember it's a question of hours! Now!"

The next minute Dundy disappeared among the trees, and the quartet, falling into single file, with their arms stretched out to shield their faces from the branches, fell into an uneven, snake-like line at his shoulders.

But they were not destined to advance more than two hundred yards into the jungle. The foliage had hardly closed behind the bobbing lan-

terns of the cabins when there was a sudden crashing in the thickets ahead; a man's curt, low-voiced order; and a dozen dark forms, seeming to spring from the ground, surrounded them. At the same instant, the rays of as many lanterns were flashed toward their dazed faces, and the gleaming barrels of a circle of levelled weapons sprang into the view of the dancing lights. The curt voice again rang out, and the words it framed, shattered the newborn hopes of the fugitives like a pane of glass crashing into pieces.

"Halt! Who goes there? Move a step, one of you, and we fire!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Noose Closes.

A GRIZZLED man, with a pair of very piercing eyes, resolute lips, and erect shoulders, sat before a huge, paper-littered desk in the chief engineer's office of the Panama Canal, perched on the topmost peak of the Culebra bluffs.

He was busily engaged in a fat bundle of typewritten reports at his elbow, so much so that he failed to hear the step of the orderly who gently pushed open the door, and stood at salute. The orderly coughed twice before the grizzled man lifted his eyes with an air of abstraction and resting his finger on a line before him, to keep his place in the document he was perusing, asked briskly:

"Well, what is it?"

"Please sir, Lieutenant Sterling has returned and wishes to see you!"

The grizzled man's face relaxed in a decided suggestion of interest. "Oh, he has, has he? Is he alone?"

"No, sir. There are four men with him."

"Do you know who they are?"

"One of them is Captain Stanton, sir. The others——"

"Oh, so Stanton is here!" The grizzled man's eyes sparkled with satisfaction, and one might have fancied that a fleeting suggestion of relief swept over his care-worn features. "Never mind telling me who the others are. Show them in at once!"

As the orderly retired, the grizzled man rose from his chair and paced rapidly back and forth across the floor of his sparsely furnished office, whose principal decorations were huge maps and blue-prints littering the walls from one end of the room to the other. He was a man who would attract attention even on a busy street. He was not a tall man, nor was he powerfully built, but there was a suggestion of the leader about his every movement, a hint of the man who is accustomed to be obeyed, which would have impressed even the most casual observer. Colonel George E. Goethals—for this was none other than the commander of the American forces at the Panama Canal—was a soldier from the tips of his toes to the crown of his head. And, like a true soldier, he had fought his way from the bottom of the ladder to the top. He was a singularly quiet, reserved man, who seldom spoke except

when absolutely compulsory, and then directly, almost curtly to the point. In fact, he made words unnecessary. One of his maxims was to do a thing, not talk about it, and he lived up to it to the letter.

It was seldom that the Colonel betrayed such an evidence of nervousness as characterized his restless pacing of his office when his orderly had disappeared. The quiet, methodical bearing with which he had been burrowing through the documents on his desk, had disappeared. One hand pulled fitfully at the ends of his close-cropped mustache, and he glanced toward the door impatiently. When it finally swung open, he started forward eagerly.

Five men entered the room, or rather four men and a youth. They were an oddly bedraggled group. Although there were evidences of a vigorous brushing, their clothes were travel-stained and torn, and in spite of a hasty attempt at repairs, presented a decidedly surprising appearance, especially for an officer as spick and span in his attire as Lieutenant Derrick Sterling. Colonel Goethals elevated his eye-brows as the young officer stepped forward.

"You look as though you have been through a scrimmage, lieutenant?"

"If you said several scrimmages, sir, you would be nearer the truth!"

"Indeed! You evidently have a story to tell. Who are your companions?"

"Two of them, Dundy and Brady, are the men whom Captain Stanton detailed to accompany me. The young man is Rodman Standish of Boston, who has been in Panama less than a week. I owe much to him in the accomplishment of my mission, and previous to that I am indebted to him for my life!"

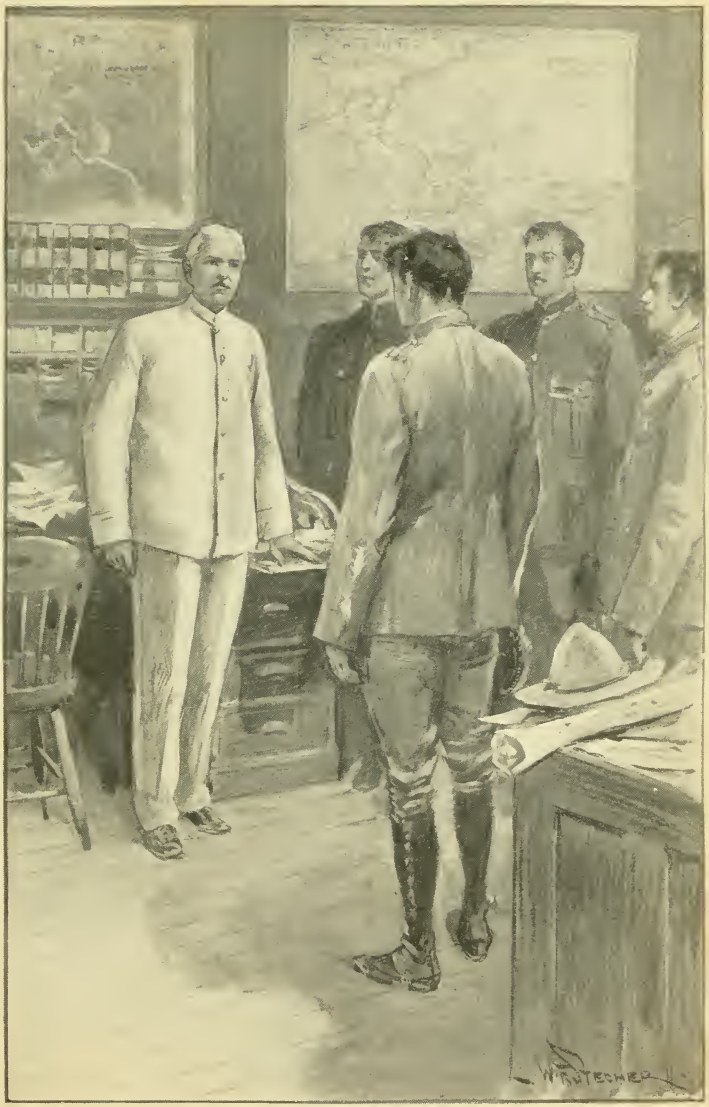
Colonel Goethals swept a sudden, shrewd glance toward the youth, which seemed to bore him through. But there was nothing of harshness about it. In fact, there was such a suggestion of strength and substance about the man that Rod felt much like the lad whose lessons are being inspected by an esteemed master.

"Standish?" repeated the Colonel thoughtfully. "I have heard that name often."

"Perhaps then you have met my father—Captain Ralph Standish?" the youth cried eagerly.

Colonel Goethals took a quick step across the room and held out his hand. "If you are Ralph Standish's son, I can begin to credit Mr. Sterling's praise! I have had the pleasure of meeting him on several occasions, my son. So you are following in his footsteps?"

Rod flushed. "O, sir, you must not accept Mr. Sterling's statement without modification. When you have heard the whole story——"



"Standish?" repeated the Colonel thoughtfully, "I have heard that name often."

"That is just what I want. With all of this discussion, I haven't had a single fact yet on which to base a conclusion. Stanton, when and where did you find Sterling, or did he find you, and where is Bulger, and what about those dredges, and—but wait. Who is the official narrator of the party? Let him go ahead and we can get at things in their proper order. Lieutenant Sterling, is that duty yours?"

"I presume, sir, that it is, and at the outset, I wish to make a correction. While I and my party might have succeeded in our task alone, it was Stanton who came to our aid at the critical moment and enabled us to finish our work.

"Tut, tut, lieutenant! You are starting in the middle of your yarn. You forget that the whole story is new to me."

"Well, sir, I'll try again, and this time, I'll stick to the trail, as Dundy says. Your orders were to locate a certain stack of French dredges near the mouth of the Chagres River, and report as to their marketable condition."

"Quite so."

"We proceeded to Colon, intending to spend a day there, and then go by boat along the coast or by train to Gatun, and follow the river. We decided on the latter course. It was while in Colon that Mr. Standish saved my life, but that doesn't properly belong in this story."

"You may include it."

"Very well. My horse took fright on Front Street, and before I could control it, the animal had the bit and started on a mad gallop down the pavement. I might have brought it up in time to avert mischief if a Panamanian cabman hadn't lost his head, and abandoned his cab directly in my path. For a minute, it looked as though I were in for a bad collision and possibly a broken neck."

"And what saved you?"

"Mr. Standish was standing on the curb at the time. He saw the situation and dashed out onto the street and into the cab. The mules were rearing like two western broncos, but he managed to turn them and get the cab into a side street just as my horse reached the spot."

"Magnificent!" the Colonel cried, enthusiastically. "That is the kind of grit we need at the Canal, Mr. Standish."

"That is what I thought, sir," responded the lieutenant, "and when I heard Mr. Standish's story, which I will let him tell you himself, and heard that he was in search of employment, I asked him to accompany me. I hope you don't think I over-stepped my duty."

"Under the circumstances, no. And then what happened? I declare you youngsters have been putting in some lively days."

"We left Colon for Gatun the next morning and headed at once down the river. In the meantime we had conclusive evidence that Bulger had learned our mission and was on our trail. In fact, he stopped me at Colon and went so far as to threaten me, and in the train we spotted one of his men, a negro of questionable character. So we were ready for warm work—and we had it.

"Bulger next showed his hand when we stopped for a skiff that Dundy and Brady had hidden in the brush. We found the boat with a hole in the bottom, and a broken knife of our friend's in the foliage.

"It was in the afternoon that we found the dredges, or at least what we considered to be the dredges. To our astonishment, they proved absolutely worthless."

Colonel Goethals uttered an exclamation. "But that was just what Bulger reported!"

"As it happened, sir, we had found the wrong machinery. I was almost on the point of turning back when Mr. Standish suggested the theory that the real dredges were farther on, and that we continue the search."

"Mr. Standish again!" commented Colonel Goethals with a smile. "But I didn't mean to interrupt you, lieutenant."

"We proceeded down the river until perhaps half a mile from the mouth, and camped for the

night, with sentries posted, of course. There was no disturbance until morning, and then we were taken completely in a trap. Before we knew it, Bulger and his men had us surrounded, and we were at their mercy."

"You surrendered?"

"There was nothing else for for it. Bulger had the drop from the start. It would have been a waste of effort to have resisted."

The Colonel nodded. "I had no idea he would go to such an extreme."

"He was playing for big stakes, sir, as you will see. He offered us the alternative of returning to Colon and verifying his report on the dredges or of being confined in the jungle at his pleasure. Of course, there was no choice. We were marched twenty miles inland and locked in a native hut, with three of Bulger's men on guard, while he went back to the Chagres. It did not need any great stretch of the imagination to divine his purpose, and that we would be kept prisoners until he had safely removed the dredges from the country. On the evening of the third day, however, thanks to Mr. Dundy's ingenuity, we succeeded in making our escape. He pretended heat-prostration, and when we called the guard, Dundy had him a prisoner and the tables reversed almost before we realized the situation ourselves. We tied the other two men

up, and made a break for the trees. By this time it was dark. It was our plan to make the Chagres by morning before we could be overtaken, or Bulger could learn of our escape."

"It was here where I came in," said Stanton, grimly.

"Yes, and we owe you two minutes of the blackest discouragement we experienced on the whole expedition," returned the lieutenant. "The first intimation that we were not alone in the jungle, Colonel, came with the flash of half a dozen lanterns ahead of us and a command to throw up our hands. We thought, of course, that we had run squarely into Bulger and another detachment on their way to the cabin, and that we were out of the frying pan into the fire with a vengeance. There was nothing for it, however, but to throw down our guns and stand like so many posts while our new captors advanced out of the darkness. When I caught sight of Stanton's face, I was never so thoroughly surprised in my life. It was just like a man condemned to die and reprieved after the handkerchief had been tied over his eyes."

Sterling paused and drew a deep breath. "I guess my part of the story ends there, sir. Captain Stanton is better equipped to go on with it than I am."

Stanton smiled. "There isn't very much to add when it is boiled down to hard facts. Lieutenant Sterling hadn't been gone from Culebra twenty-four hours before I discovered that Bulger, as I suspected, was trying to perpetrate a fraud and that the dredges which he represented as worthless were really so valuable that he had entered into negotiations with a New York firm to dispose of them for a handsome sum. When I found that Mr. Bulger had also left Culebra, it was not difficult to put two and two together, and understand that he was probably on Mr. Sterling's trail, and that there would be mischief if the lieutenant tried to block his game."

The Colonel nodded. "Yes, I recall our conversation just before you left for the Chagres. I was really rather worried about Mr. Sterling. I knew that Bulger was undoubtedly well supplied with men if he contemplated moving the machinery, and could see that I had probably sent the lieutenant into the lion's mouth. But how did you strike Sterling's trail, Stanton?"

"Do you rcall the lieutenant's reference to a spy of Bulger's, who trailed them to Gatun? He was a colored man, rejoicing in the appropriate sobriquet of 'Sleepy Sam.' He was always more asleep than awake, except on those occasions when he was engaged in a questionable business, such as Bulger supplied him with. Then he was

one of the most alert rascals unhung. When I stumbled across Sam at Gatun, I collared him on suspicion and put him through the 'Third Degree.' I don't recommend that procedure often, but I know Sam and I know Bulger, and, on this occasion, the result was just what I expected. Sam unburdened himself of everything. When he was through, I started down the Chagres, with Sam under my eye. We sighted Bulger near the mouth, and I ordered Sam to go ahead and question him, on the pretension that he had seen me at Gatun and had come to warn him. I was taking chances, of course, on my man coming back, but I had sized him up correctly, and a few hours later he came into our camp with the news that Bulger had the lieutenant and his party prisoners. Sam knew the location of Bulger's huts, and I took the trail without delay, knowing that 'Big Bill' could not possibly get his machinery out of the river until we returned. We ran into Mr. Sterling, as he has told you, and formed a neat little ambush for the three gentlemen who had been guarding them. We bunked at the cabins that night, and reached the Chagres the evening of the next day.

"Bulger's dredges were hardly two hundred yards from the mouth. If Mr. Sterling had kept on half an hour more, his course would have led him in a straight line squarely into them.

"There were five men working under 'Big Bill's' orders. He had chartered a small launch and was loading the machinery into it after dark. He had about twelve hours more work ahead of him when we arrived on the scene. I don't think I ever saw a more bewildered man in my life when Bulger heard my voice and looked down the mouth of my revolver. He just collapsed. But there was no chance for a fight, even if he had been disposed to make one. The odds were so overwhelmingly against him that no one in his right senses would have thought of resisting. Bulger threw down his gun and elevated his hands as meekly as a lamb, while we went through the boat."

Stanton paused. "I'm not much on gingerbread adjectives, Colonel. Is there anything else you want me to say?"

"Where is Bulger now?"

"As secure in the Culebra jail as bolts and bars can make him, and his men are enjoying cells in the same corridor."

"And the dredges?"

"I left them at the Chagres under a strong guard. Lieutenant Sterling estimates, sir, that they are worth easily ten thousand dollars. You can understand that Mr. Bulger would have been well repaid for his work if his plan had gone through."

"And the Canal Commission is saved a neat little sum in consequence," the Colonel observed, pertinently. "Are you tired, Mr. Sterling?"

"Not a great deal, sir. Why?"

"I thought, perhaps, you would appreciate a few days' relief from duty in which to recover your bearings. You have earned a vacation, and I have no doubt that Captain Stanton will think the same in regard to Brady and Dundy. In my next report to the Secretary of War, Mr. Sterling, I shall take great pleasure in mentioning this little episode. Have you anything farther to suggest in the matter?"

Sterling glanced toward Rod. "Only this, sir. Mr. Standish is very anxious to obtain a berth at the Canal, and I believe he is fully deserving of your consideration. I should like to recommend him, if I may, sir."

Colonel Goethals turned his shrewd gray eyes again toward the youth.

"Lieutenant Sterling is right, Mr. Standish. I had intended taking up the subject on my own initiative. I presume you would prefer an office position, would you not?"

"On the contrary, sir, I would much prefer to be out of doors."

The Colonel drummed thoughtfully on his desk. "I am afraid, then, that the only place I could offer you would hardly be to the liking

of a young man trained as you have been. The average college man seems to have a horror of grease spots and rough hands, and they would both be necessary accompaniments of any position I could give you in the open."

Rod smiled. "I can assure you, sir, that would not be the slightest drawback in my case. I have to earn my living, and if I can't do it by my books, I see no disgrace in doing so by my hands. If you can put me to work, I won't be afraid of grease, I can promise you!"

"Well spoken, Mr. Standish! It is a real pleasure to meet with a college-trained man with those sentiments. And I am going to take you at your word. How would you like to do duty as a craneman?"

Rod glanced uncertainly at Sterling. The lieutenant was tapping his foot on the floor and didn't meet his glance.

"I don't believe I understand what you mean, sir."

"A craneman is the term applied to one of the operators of a steam shovel. He guides the great iron dipper, and, to be frank with you, the post is regarded as one of the hardest and most disagreeable on the Canal. In the first place, he is obliged to maintain a cramped position, and must watch his movements as carefully as the worker on a sky-scraper. In the second place, the heat

is very oppressive, and he receives the full force of all of the grime and dirt from the car below. In the third place, he must be always alert, cool-headed, and quick to respond to an emergency. He finishes his day's work completely exhausted, and covered with grease and perspiration from head to heels. I am not painting a rosy picture, you see. Do you still want the position?"

Rod glanced again toward the lieutenant. Sterling had crossed the room and stood gazing out of the window. As the Colonel paused, he turned with a curious compression of his lips.

"I am sorry, Standish, that there isn't anything better to offer you. Of course you won't think of taking such work as that!"

"Why not?"

Sterling elevated his eyebrows.

"Great Scot, man, you are not going to reduce yourself to the plane of a common laborer! You won't be able to get the feel of the soot out of your body for a year, and your hands —"

"I didn't suppose I was going to have manicured nails when I came down here!" Rod said slowly. "I gave that idea up when I found I would have to earn my own living. I'm not used to roughing it, Sterling, I'll admit, but I am not ashamed of it, if I have to. And it will be a man's work—an honest man's work! Colonel Goethals, I accept your offer!"

A hearty hand descended suddenly on the lad's shoulder, and he glanced up into the kindly face of Captain Stanton.

"You're true grit, all the way through, Standish!"

Lieutenant Sterling's lip curled almost imperceptibly, and then, shrugging his shoulders, he likewise held out his hand. But his old heartiness had gone. Rod could not tell just where the difference was, but he felt it, and a hot flush surged over his face.

"I wish you luck, Standish!" said the lieutenant, lamely.

And Sterling walked back to the window, and again became absorbed in his study of the landscape.

CHAPTER XIX.

Uncle Sam, Storekeeper.

ROD was assigned to one of the government bachelor quarters at Culebra—a square, white building, much on the order of the hotels at the popular American summer resorts, with a wide veranda extending its full length, both on the lower and upper floors. Innumerable little rooms, used by the men as sleeping quarters, filled the greater part of both floors. Many of them were shared by two persons, but Rod was given a chamber alone. It was easy to detect the supervision of army routine at the first glance. There was none of the careless, slip-shod appearance of the usual boarding-house for men. Each room was as carefully cleaned as the quarters of a military barracks. The garments were neatly suspended on hooks, the furniture looked as spick and span as though it had been freshly rubbed with a dust cloth, and even the books and bric-a-brac were arranged in methodical array.

None of the rooms were either plastered or papered, and the fact struck Rod as curious until he learned that owing to the climatic conditions

of the tropics, it would be a waste of time and money to finish a building in the style of the temperate zone. Instead of plaster or paper, a number of coats of paint were used, often as many as four or five, rendering the walls proof against the weather, and at the same time presenting a neat, uniform appearance, which would have been impossible with wall paper constantly "peeling" off. It was necessary even to pain the floor joists for protection against the elements, so that a four-room building in Panama involves a cost as great as a fourteen-room house in "the States," in spite of its more elaborate interior finishing.

Rod found that his meals would be supplied at the government mess hall, farther down the hill, and that both the working and leisure hours of his days would be guided by as much routine as would be observed at an army post. When he concluded his inspection of his quarters, he found that it was after twelve o'clock. Already the men from the "Cut" were pouring into the building for a preliminary wash before dinner, and Rod, feeling a good deal like a strange boy at boarding-school, joined the long line wending its way toward the mess hall. As he came down the steps of the veranda a hearty voice greeted him from the street, and he glanced up to see the twinkling eyes of Captain Stanton smiling at him.

Stanton strode forward briskly and held out his hand. As it closed over Rod's fingers, the pressure was so firm and hearty that a smile of appreciation was forced into the youth's eyes. The boy recalled Sterling's definition of Stanton at Colon as "the Rough Rider police chief." There was nothing of the Rough Rider in his immaculate blue serge suit and white tie, however. It was only when one's glance noted the stalwart shoulders, the tall, well-knit figure, the steady eyes and wind-tanned face that the suggestion of out-door life was apparent. As a matter of fact, as Rod was to learn, Stanton had more whirlwind frontier experiences to his credit and more narrow escapes from danger in wild forms than any other man on the Isthmus. Cowboy, champion bronco buster of Colorado, Indian guide, hunting companion of Colonel Roosevelt, United States Marshal, soldier of fortune, his life was crowded full of stirring adventure from Alaska to South America.

"Are you settled yet, Mr. Standish?" Stanton queried genially, as he came to a pause. "You will find that Panama—at least American Panama—is not so strange as it seems. Have you had dinner?"

"To tell the truth, I am on my way now."

"I suppose you are quartered at the government mess. How would you like my company?"

"First rate!" the lad responded enthusiastically. "That is, if I am not imposing on you."

"Not at all. I was beginning to feel the need of dinner myself, and perhaps I can give you some hints as we eat that will help you to get your bearings. I can never forget my first days at the Canal Zone, although I was too busy to have any time to feel lonesome."

"How long ago was that?"

"Oh, I was what we call here one of the 'old-timers.' I have been on the Isthmus about four years."

"And you call that being one of the 'old-timers?' " Rod asked, laughing.

"You would think so if you could compare the comforts we have here to-day with the conditions then. That was only a little while after the Americans began active work, you know. Those were the days when we had to knock the old French machinery apart to obtain nails for bunks! A man thought himself fairly well off if he had a corner of a window glass to shave by, and didn't find a tarantula on his blanket when he woke up in the morning. And mosquitoes! We had them in tons—yes, sir, in tons! Why, do you know that as late as 1906 it needed one hundred thousand grains of quinine every twenty-four hours to ward off the fever germs of the mosquitoes?"

"One hundred thousand grains!" Rod repeated, dazed.

"Quite a respectable allowance, eh? If you want it in higher figures, in one month the Isthmus used over four hundred and fifty pounds, or more than 1,575,000 two-grain capsules! How's that?"

Rod drew a deep breath. "Well, I'm glad that times have changed. I don't understand, though, just what you mean by the fever germs of the insects. Are the mosquitoes responsible for disease?"

"Are they responsible!" echoed Stanton. "They are the greatest carriers of germs known to science! We have more than fifty different varieties of mosquitoes in Panama, and there are three of them whose bites are almost deadly. It often happens that a person who is bitten by one of these is a corpse within a week. You see, the mosquitoes are hatched in the slimiest water on the Isthmus. They flourish in dark, unwholesome pools, which are nearly always full of fever-germs. While the insects are not infected, yet the tiny particles of slime which cling to their bodies are deadly poison to a man. In an apparently harmless bite there may be left in the victim's blood a poison so virulent that before he realizes his peril he is in a dangerous condition."

"Have the mosquitoes been eliminated? I

don't think I have felt more than three or four since I have been in the country."

"That is because the Americans realized that unless they conquered the insects, the insects would conquer them. The French made the mistake of deeming the mosquitoes of no consequence except as bringing irritation and discomfort, and they could never understand why they could not subdue the jungle fever. We went to work at the insects among the very first things that we did. It took us over four years, at the rate of a million dollars of expense a year, to win, but we won in the end. That is one reason why the death rate of the Canal Zone, formerly one of the plague spots of the globe, is now less than that of the city of New York!"

Rod whistled. "But how was this brought about?"

"We eliminated not only the mosquitoes, but the swamps where the mosquitoes were bred. Sometimes we found that these were located miles away in the jungle. Often the men of the sanitary department followed a solitary mosquito for hours, until they tracked it to its lair. Then the hole where it was bred was covered up and the danger from *that* source removed. Mosquitoes are hatched very rapidly. Their eggs are often glued together in a thin, sticky scum at the bottom of the pool and the larvae, or "wrig-

glers," as you probably call them, appear in a period of from twelve hours to six days. Sometimes several thousands of these eggs are found in a single pool. If our sanitary engineers had not grappled with the situation as they did, it is more than probable that the Canal would never have been dug. It would have been impossible for the workmen to have survived the fever, no matter how well the plans of the construction engineers were laid."

"Well, this is the first time I knew that a little insect like a mosquito put a great nation like France to rout!" said Rod, thoughtfully.

"You will learn a good many other facts as curious as that if you stay here long enough," observed Stanton, as the two ascended the steps to the mess hall. "Did you know that it was necessary for Uncle Sam to go into the grocery and baking business before he could dig the Canal? What would you say if I told you that the government is running a laundry, an artificial ice plant, a coffee-roasting and macaroni factory, and a department store down here in the jungle? After we have had our dinner, if you are interested, I will tell you about it. You will find that the mechanical difficulties of the Canal were not the only obstacles we had to overcome, by any means!"

The scene which met Rod's gaze was not un-

like that of a busy restaurant at the noon hour in any American city, with the exception of the fact that on one side of the building practically all of the men were in their shirt sleeves. The section into which Stanton led him, however, presented more of the conventional aspect of the ordinary restaurant. Waiters, in trim, neat suits and long white aprons, were passing swiftly to and fro, with all of the silence and deference of the well-trained hotel attendant. The menu card was pushed across to Rod as he took his seat, and the bill of fare brought a cry of surprise from him. He had formed a vague picture of badly-cooked camp fare, such as perhaps might be served to an army on the march. But the meal outlined before him could hardly have been surpassed in a well-equipped hotel at home. This was what the menu card contained:

"Mixed pickles; Rhode Island clam chowder; lobster with mayonnaise; roast young turkey (stuffed) with cranberry sauce; French toast with fruit sauce; asparagus with melted butter; potatoes in cream; chocolate ice cream; jelly cake, cheese, crackers; tea, cocoa, coffee."

"How does that strike you for jungle fare?" grinned Stanton, as he noticed the boy's glance of amazement.

"How in the world is it done?"

"I imagine you would increase the emphasis

of your question if you knew that every pound of provisions, with the exception of a few native fruits, must be transported over two thousand miles! I wonder what Napoleon would say if he could come back to life and see such a meal as this served to an army of thirty thousand men in the heart of a tropical jungle, nearly twenty-five hundred miles from home? I imagine he would make plans to capture our commissary without delay. A man like Napoleon could appreciate the science of our provender! But, seriously speaking, to my mind the details of feeding and housing and clothing the men who are digging the Canal are even more wonderful than the feats which the engineers are doing."

"You said you would tell me something about Uncle Sam as a store-keeper," said Rod. "It seems to me that this discussion comes under that head."

"It does. There are over 40,000 people dependent on the American government in Panama for food, shelter, and even clothing. In the number are forty different nationalties, ranging all the way from the Jamaican Negro to the Norwegian, and from the Chinaman to the Canadian. If they were all Americans, the problem would be difficult enough, but fancy having to satisfy the tastes of nearly every nation on the globe! And if we undertook to make the Italian

live on beefsteak instead of spaghetti, and the Chinaman on biscuits instead of rice, the chances are that their working capacity would be seriously affected, even if the change of diet didn't end by putting them on the hospital list. So fifteen tons of rice are shipped to us every week for the Chinese by the boats of the government steamship line, and we have erected a macaroni and spaghetti factory for the Italians, and our workmen are thriving. We have learned that the best way to get a full day's work from any man is to feed him well.

"Of course we don't pretend to give all of our men meals as elaborate as this one. We have them divided into classes, according to their nationality and character of work. For instance, the West Indian negro is given his meals for ten cents. The European laborers are fed at a cost of twelve and a half cents per capita. Those are what we call the "silver" laborers. The "gold" employees, that is, the men who command wages large enough to be paid in gold, have a menu such as we have been given here. The government supplies all of the provisions at cost, so you will find that this meal involves an expenditure of only thirty cents.

"The commissary department alone carries a pay-roll of over 500 men, and its expenses are about $350,000 a month. Of course, this latter

item is practically off-set by the income from the employees.

"All of this involves an immense amount of detail work, you can believe. It was necessary to build a cold storage plant, where the meats could be kept from spoiling; an artificial ice plant, where we could obtain our own ice, something like sixty tons a day; and even a bakery, which produces nearly a hundred and fifty thousand loaves of bread each week."

"What about the employees that don't eat at the mess halls, the men with families, for example?" asked Rod.

"Uncle Sam has to supply their provisions also. For this purpose, he operates a chain of commissary stores, extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific, where the government employees can purchase their goods by coupon. Each man is given a book of tickets, divided in a ratio of one cent, and representing a cash value of fifteen dollars. With these, he or his wife can purchase their day's supplies in the same manner as at an ordinary grocery store at home. Fifteen freight cars are needed every day to keep these jungle commissaries supplied. They are loaded, of course, from the government warehouse at Colon, and make a daily trip across the Isthmus, depositing the orders of each station on the deposit platform. A system of delivery wagons

carries them to the commissary, and thence to the houses of the customers, so that the American woman in the Panamanian jungle has almost all of the conveniences of home. She can even telephone for her day's provisions, if she cares to."

"You don't mean to say that you have a telephone system in this wilderness?"

"We have over eight hundred instruments in operation. And that isn't the only feature of civilization we have installed. We have a police force of over two hundred men, eleven fire-engine stations, and twenty-four school houses, with an enrollment of over one thousand pupils! You see, Uncle Sam had to build a civilization before he could build the Canal."

"What about the furniture of the family houses?" Rod queried. "Do the men have to bring the equipment of their homes with them?"

"No, indeed! In fact, Uncle Sam is the most unique landlord in the world. Not only does he provide houses rent free, but he furnishes them in addition. You can understand that it would be out of the question for the average employee to move his household furniture two thousand miles, and then carry it back with him when the Canal is finished. So the government has solved the problem by relieving him of the difficulty of both house and furniture."

As Stanton finished speaking, he rose from

the table with a glance at his watch. "By the way, Standish, I have a little expedition scheduled for this afternoon that you might enjoy. How would you like to take a trip with me through Culebra Cut?"

"Splendid!" Rod cried heartily. "You see, I don't begin work until Monday morning, and that would give me a chance to gain an idea of my duty beforehand. You are mighty kind to a stranger, Captain. The only trouble is that I don't know how I can return my obligations."

"The best way, in a case of that kind, is to forget them!" said Stanton, smiling.

Rod reached into his pocket for the red meal ticket, which had been advanced to him from his first month's wages. As he did so, he pulled out a sealed envelope with it. He saw with surprise that it was sealed, and that it was addressed to himself. How could it have come there? His coat had not been removed from his back since he had reached Culebra. With a quick jerk he tore open the envelope and shook it out. A bank note and a folded slip of paper fluttered to the table. Rod opened the letter in a dazed bewilderment and read:

"Dear Standish—

"Here is a little loan, which I am well enough acquainted with Panama, to know that you will

need. I would prefer that you forget all about it. They say that money matters should not be mentioned between friends, you know. I am going to slip this into your pocket at my first chance and know you will find it sooner or later.

"Yours,

"Derrick Sterling."

Rod glanced at the bank note. It was a crisp twenty dollar bill. For a moment he hesitated, in a whirl of emotions. Then he thrust the bill into his wallet and followed Stanton.

"Good old Sterling!" he muttered.

Then the remembrance of the lieutenant's sudden coolness when he had taken the post on the steam shovel came to him, and he flushed.

"Well, I might have felt the same myself a month ago," he muttered. "It is curious what four weeks of knocking against the world will do for a chap!"

CHAPTER XX.

The Battle of the Mountain.

THE little brown man, stripped to his glistening wet breast, shaded his blinking eyes and stared at his questioner gravely across his long steel drill.

"Me no speaka the Americana! Excuse me. Busy—vera busy!"

Captain Stanton smiled as he clambered down from the seat of the railroad motor, which had whizzed him and Rod past the fresh green foliage of the jungle, the scowling cliffs of the great brown mountains and the twisting, shrieking, rumbling lines of puffing engines and fat, bulging freight cars, into the inferno of the Culebra Cut.

"So you are a son of Italy, my friend, who knows Uncle Sam's dollars but doesn't know his language. I asked you what you are doing? Are you making ready to fire a blast?"

The little brown man shook his head helplessly.

"Big noisa soon, vera big noisa!"

He jammed the end of his drill into the clay

and stiffened his back as the curt, scowling face of the khaki-clad foreman appeared from the end of a stationary freight car.

"Big noisa!" he repeated solemnly. "And mucha danger!" he added, significantly, as he shuffled over among the perspiring ranks of his companions.

Stanton turned to Rod with a sweep of his arm. "I'll venture to say that among that gang of air-drillers, six men, I believe, there are almost as many different nationalities. I'll ask the foreman to satisfy myself. Hello, Smith. How many corners of the globe have you drawn your recruits from?"

Smith grinned as he mopped his forehead and raised his voice, in order to be heard above the din of a thundering locomotive that suddenly began to exercise its steel lungs.

"Five, to be exact, Stanton. We have two Italians, one Jamaican, one Chilean, one Swede, and one man from Milwaukee. He is the only one of the whole lot that knows enough to answer me back. I have to make signs to the others!"

"You see, I wasn't far out of the way," said Stanton to Rod, as the foreman ran hastily over to a corner of the cliff where his men were boring a slender little pipe into the bowels of the earth, while the chug-chug of the ungainly air-driller

at their elbow continued monotonously like the hoarse ticking of a clock with a bad cold.

"Shall we stay for the blast?" Stanton continued. "I imagine they are just about ready to fire it. You'll get so used to blasting down here that you won't mind it any more than thunder storms at home."

Rod nodded, and Stanton gave an order to their chauffeur to back their car onto a siding out of the way of the criss-crossing "dirt trains." It was a curious vehicle, the government railroad motor that had whirled them between the huge, over-hanging walls of the "Cut." It was quite enough in itself to hold Rod's curiosity. The wheels were grooved to fit the rails of the track. Otherwise, it was built like a combination of the ordinary automobile and the cab of an engine. The chauffeur let out his top speed for a mile of the way, and as Rod pressed his hat down over his eyes and crouched low in his seat, the walls of foliage swept past so swiftly that they were reduced to a dull, confused blur. He was not surprised when Stanton told him, as they recovered their breath, that they had made the mile in just a fraction over a minute.

"And I think I can do even better, with a flying start!" the chauffeur added, grimly. "Shall I try it?"

But just then the opening of the Cut burst

into view, and with a glimpse of the clanging "dirt trains" ahead, the speed trial was postponed.

"Do you know what this reminds me most of?" asked Rod, as he and his companion stepped closer to watch the final preparations of the air-drillers. "It is for all the world like the pictures I have seen of famous battle fields."

Stanton glanced up at the towering cliffs on either side of the narrow gorge; the great, bristling steam shovels with their long iron dippers reminding one of some uncanny monster of iron and steel suddenly endowed with fiendish life; the rows of creaking cars and shrieking engines; the blue-black haze of smoke that hung over the scene like a sombre pall; the lines of toiling, sweating men, hundreds of them, burrowing into the sticky red clay like an army of ants and seeming scarcely larger when compared to the bulging mountains and the giant machinery that was crashing deeper and deeper into their rocky breasts.

"Yes, you are right, Standish," the Captain said musingly. "And the simile is deepened if we consider the forces of Nature as one army and the forces of man as another. For centuries, the mountain and jungle have defied the efforts of man to conquer them. They have seen thousands of the little, insignificant creatures that

called themselves men go down to defeat and death before them. Now, Man has armed himself with strange, new, horrible weapons of warfare, which he calls locomotives and steam shovels and air-drillers, and has equipped himself with a more deadly power of destruction which he calls dynamite, and the jungle and the mountain are being routed! Yes, you are right about the battle-field. I never thought of that before."

"How many engines are at work here?" Rod questioned curiously, as his gaze turned from the group around the dynamite blast to the great rows of cars, slipping back, darting forward, now rounding each other's ends, and now crashing together, as though they were playing at tag with one another like so many lumbering giants, uncertain of their footing.

"On a busy day, it is not uncommon for over a hundred locomotives to be employed in the Cut at the same time. There have even been over a thousand freight cars either entering or leaving at once. When you add to these figures the fact that there is a force of ten thousand men employed in the Culebra Cut, you soon begin to appreciate the size of Uncle Sam's army of peace down here.

"But if you want statistics, I can give you some that will make you gasp even more than these."

"Go ahead!" said Rod, smiling.

"Every two minutes a ton of coal is burned up on the Isthmus. Every minute of the working day, twelve car-loads of dirt are torn from the earth—every minute, mind you. You can begin to understand now why twelve hundred freight cars are needed. They don't seem such a tremendous equipment when you view the work they are called upon to do. But I am not done. All of this labor involves a tremendous expenditure of money. The battle with the jungle and mountain costs Uncle Sam one hundred and twenty-five dollars a minute—for his pay roll alone. None of his equipment or other expenses enter into this sum at all."

"Let me get my breath!" interrupted Rod.

"Oh, I am just leading up to my climax. If all of the dirt taken out of the course of the Panama Canal in one day—emphasize that one day—were excavated from one section, it would leave a chasm that would bury twenty-five houses, three stories in height, and each of them measuring forty feet in width and length! Loaded into a train, the earth would fill twelve cars to their capacity every minute—one flat car, thirty-eight feet long, every five seconds! If a different car were used for each load, at the end of the day, there would be a train thirty-eight miles long!

"If the earth taken from the Canal in one year were transported to New York City, it would form a twelve-inch covering over Manhattan Island from the North to the East River, and from Fifty-ninth Street to the Battery, and there would be enough left over to bury the whole of Central Park five feet deep!"

Rod was silent as Stanton paused. The Captain laughed as he noticed the youth's expression of blank bewilderment.

"Oh, I am always primed on the subject of the Canal! Talk about your great wars and your famous marches and sieges. There is nothing to my mind as thrilling as this battle of peace here in the Wilderness. Do you want some more statistics, Standish, from another angle?"

"Are they as staggering as the others?"

"You may find them more so. Of course, you know that the principal material used in the construction of the Canal is concrete. If I told you the number of barrels that would be consumed, the figures would probably be vague and indefinite to you, just as a billion dollars, for instance, would be even to the man accustomed to handling a great deal of money. But when I tell you that the concrete in the Canal would build over twenty-two thousand houses, of two stories, eight rooms each, you begin to catch something of the immensity of it, don't you? But we can go still

farther. These houses would accommodate the entire population of a city of a hundred and fifty thousand. The concrete in the Canal would build homes enough for every family in Omaha, Nebraska; Toledo, Ohio; Dallas, Texas; or any of a dozen other cities in the same class that you could name.

"Suppose you put each of these houses in a seventy-five foot lot. You would have enough to line both sides of a street extending all the way from New York to Philadelphia, with enough left to fill one side of a street clear from Philadelphia to Washington!"

Rod's gaze shifted from the animated face of Captain Stanton to the bent figures of the laborers clustered about the air-driller.

"And I am going to have a part in it all! That is the best fact, to me, in your whole talk. Why, I can almost begin to think of the loss of college cheerfully when I remember that I am going to be one of the men on the 'Big Job' down here! Do you know it seems to me that even those Italians over there, without even a knowledge of English, have caught the spirit of it! We are going to do something to make the world wonder a thousand years from now, just as we are still wondering at the Pyramids."

Stanton nodded. "And it will be an American triumph! The old Flag will have the credit. Do

you realize what that means? But, I say, we are forgetting ourselves. Look out, Standish!" the Captain broke off sharply. "They are getting ready to fire that blast!"

Even as he was speaking, Stanton was running backward toward the motor, drawn up on a siding fifty yards in the rear. As he saw Rod follow him, he turned and increased his pace. The laborers in the vicinity of the sputtering fuse had already sought shelter. A sudden hush settled over the Cut as though by some mysterious sixth sense, every man in a radius of a quarter of a mile knew of the little flickering eye of flame and the buried kegs of powder toward which it was hastening. Even the screeching of the locomotives was stilled. It was as though every activity had been suspended by a prearranged signal, waiting for the blast.

And then it came. A great stack of cannons might have been suddenly discharged point-blank at the rocks of the mountains. Rod felt the earth sway under his feet, and as he caught the side of the car, he saw a dense, heavy cloud of gravel and jagged rocks belch upward from the cliff.

Silence—a silence more intense and oppressive than the first. The world was settling back to normal again as though fearing to breathe. But the blast was not finished. A second explosion

rent the hugh cliff, muffled and sullen and sounding strangely far away as though it had been touched off deep down in the caverns of the earth. There was the sound of rushing foot-steps as it died away, and sudden, hoarse shouts. The roar of industry sprang again into life as though it, too, were a giant dynamite blast and the spark had ignited. As Rod glanced back, he saw that the bustle and din of Culebra had been resumed with added fervor as though impatient of the lost moments, and eager to atone for them.

The shifting of the lad's gaze prevented his discovery of a white-haired, elderly gentleman who was crossing the tracks rapidly in his direction. The newcomer dodged around the end of a puffing locomotive, sprang nimbly across the last line of rails, and then as he was about to clap the boy on the shoulder, Rod whirled and the eyes of the two met.

"Judge Arnold!" the lad cried.

"Do you know, young man, that I have been trying to find you for nearly two days?"

"Find me?" the youth echoed as the Judge released his hand. "Why?"

"Do you remember that you ran away from me? I don't know what you call it, but I feel that you deliberately fled from us at Colon. Generally I believe in letting a runaway take care of himself, but in this case, I made up my

mind to take your trail. Do you know what this young man did, Captain Stanton?"

Stanton, who had been a curious observer of the scene, shook his head with a smile. "From what little I know of Mr. Standish, I wouldn't be surprised at anything, Judge. What has he done this time?"

"Oh, he only saved me from losing the best daughter a father ever had! That's all! Standish would probably say it wasn't worth mentioning."

"And what do you think he did after it was all over? Edith's shock brought on a severe fever and while I was at her bedside, fearing that every breath would be her last, the young man left the boat without giving me even a chance to thank him and without leaving so much as a scrap of his address! I call that a deliberate case of running away, for my part. I maintain that a father has certain privileges in a case of that kind, and that one of those privileges is at least an opportunity to show his gratitude. As a result of Mr. Standish's flight, he has placed me under the necessity of trailing him half across Panama, if for nothing else than to satisfy my own conscience. Now that I have found him, what would you suggest that I do with him?"

"Well, I think we still have a vacant cell left in the Culebra jail!" laughed Stanton. "We

have been hearing from the young gentleman ourselves since you lost track of him!"

Judge Arnold thoughtfully rubbed his glasses, and carefully replaced them. "I don't doubt it, Stanton. I don't doubt it! Panama, I should say, would offer him excellent opportunities, and evidently our friend has been improving them."

Rod broke into the conversation with a flush and a swift desire to change the subject. "All this time, Judge, you have neglected to tell me how Miss Edith is. Has she recovered from her illness?"

Judge Arnold flashed a shrewd glance at the lad. "She is well past the danger point, and convalescing as rapidly as we can expect under the circumstances. I may say, Standish, that like myself she feels keenly the fact that you didn't even leave an address where she could send her thanks. She felt sure that she would find a note from you when we reached home. Now, when I was a lad like you, there is nothing that would have swollen my pride more than to have paraded as a hero before a young woman!"

Rod affected a sudden and profound interest in a study of the different strata of clay in the cliff above him as the Judge paused. Stanton's eyes turned from him to Judge Arnold with a twinkle.

"To an unprejudiced observer, it appears to me that you have our friend in a corner from which there is absolutely no escape. Have you a defence to offer, Standish, or will you hoist the white flag of surrender without a fight?"

"Have you made any further plans as to what you intend to do at the Canal, my boy?" the Judge asked abruptly.

"I have accepted a berth at the Culebra Cut."

"May I ask what kind of a berth?"

"Colonel Goethals has given me a place as craneman on one of the steam shovels."

A languid, drawling voice, curiously familiar to Rod, caught up the words. As the youth whirled, he recognized the immaculate form, indolent bearing, and arrogant eye-glass of Wingrave Sutton. The young Englishman stood twirling his light walking stick and staring at Rod with an air of patronizing tolerance.

"A craneman, eh?" So you are to work on a steam-shovel? Well, for a person in your position, I should say that the chance is a very good one. Do you not agree with me, Judge? There is nothing like honest toil, Standish, to—."

"Mr. Standish, if you please!" interrupted Rod curtly.

Sutton's eye-glass almost lost its delicate balance. "Upon my word! For a craneman, my dear fellow, you are certainly a curiosity!"

"You are right, Sutton. Mr. Standish is a curiosity," said the Judge drily. "Though hardly in the sense to which you refer!"

The Englishman's eyes sparkled with satisfaction. "I feel kindly toward you, my young man. In saving Miss Arnold's life, you have also placed me under obligations to you. Here is a five pound note. Don't thank me. I assure you that you are perfectly welcome to it!"

For a moment, Rod stared from the fluttering bill to the face of the man, whose fingers were gingerly extending it. Then he caught it abruptly, rolled it swiftly into a tight wad, and tossed it at the feet of the staring Britisher.

Whirling on his heels, he motioned to Stanton. "If you are ready to go back, Captain, I will join you!"

"But, my dear boy," Judge Arnold burst out, "listen to me! Just a moment, I entreat you, Standish!"

Rod turned for an instant. "I thank you, Judge, but I am perfectly able to fight my battles alone! I need no help of any kind either from you or Mr. Sutton!"

The Judge started impulsively down the track as though he would catch the boy's shoulders. But Rod quickened his steps and climbed into the motor at Stanton's side without a backward glance.

With a convulsive quiver, the car bounded forward down the Cut, leaving Judge Arnold and his companion staring after it.

CHAPTER XXI.

A Bird's Eye View of the Panama Canal.

THE homeward trip was made almost in silence. Neither Stanton nor Rod referred to the unpleasant incident in the Cut. The former possessed too much delicacy to attempt to pry into the other's affairs or to probe a wound, which, he was quick to see, had touched Rod's sensitive spirit to the quick. The youth was too immersed in his own bitter thoughts to open a conversation on any topic.

As the motor swung into the rough shed which sheltered it, at the junction of the main track, however, Stanton with a quick digest of the cause of the lad's silence, determined to arouse him from his moodiness. From his pocket, he produced a small hand map which he spread out on the table in the railroad garage, with the observation; "A good soldier, Standish, always studies the plan of the enemy's country before he begins a campaign. I think it would be an excellent idea for you to familiarize yourself with the course of the Canal and the topography of the Isthmus before you assume your duties at the

Cut. With your engineering training, the mechanical plan of the Canal I should think would be of especial interest to you."

"Is that a map of the 'Big Ditch'?" Rod asked, bending over his friend's shoulder.

"Yes, and it is just the kind of a map that will give you a bird's-eye glimpse of the important facts down here. I imagine that like most Americans, you have only a vague conception of just what kind of a water-route the Canal is to be?"

"Of course, I know that it begins at the Atlantic and ends at the Pacific and will be something like fifty miles in length. Otherwise, I suppose that it will be a good deal like any of the other great canals of the world, won't it?"

"That is just where most of the American public have the wrong impression. It is because the Panama Canal is *not* like other canals that makes it so noteworthy a project. To begin with, nearly half of the big waterway won't be a canal at all."

"How is that?"

"It will be a monster artificial sea, wider than many sections of the Great Lakes of the United States. I refer to the portion of the Canal which begins at the Gatun Dam. The American engineers have put the Chagres River to work here, and are harnessing its fiery current in spite of itself, so that when the big dam is finished, the

stream will make a wonderful lake with a surface area of over a billion square feet. The length will measure nearly twenty-five miles. When you add that it will have a depth of over seven hundred and fifty feet and that it will be large enough to accommodate all of the navies of the world, assembled at one time, you can see that the man with the blue print and the compass, who looked across the spiteful Chagres River and conceived the idea of putting it into a harness to do this work, was one of those dreamers, who not do this work, was one of those dreamers, who have the ability to make them come true.

"The Gatun Dam, when finished will be one of the greatest engineering feats in the history of the world. It is easy enough to give you big statistics of its size, but I might as well try to picture the Pyramids to you in yards and feet.

"It is hard to conceive of the tons of earth and granite that it will need to hold in check the largest artificial body of water in the world, which Gatun Lake will be. Can you picture a great mass of rock and clay over a mile long, half a mile wide at the base, and ninety feet high?

"If you can, you will have a frame-work in your mind's eye of the Gatun Dam. When you face the task of its physical construction, it is not hard to see where and why an army of men will have to toil for ten years to make the daring project on paper a reality.

"But I can emphasize the enormity of the work from a still more vivid angle. The village of Gatun, from which you started on your trip down the Chagres, will be buried forever from the sight of man under nearly a hundred feet of water, and almost a quarter of a mile of the jungle for a distance of twenty-five miles farther inland, will share the same fate. In fact, much of the present landscape which the tourist sees from the Panama Railroad, and even the railroad itself, is doomed. In a period of three or four years, it will form the bottom of a sea as deep as many sections of the Atlantic. The pressure of such a body of water, you can understand, will be something almost incomprehensible. The only way by which the engineer can measure it is by multiplying units of square feet by millions, and then more millions. Even though one of our great mountain peaks could be transported to Gatun, by some wizard, such a sea would force its way through the earth, perhaps in a generation. It is not enough to have a mountain to hold the lake in check. The mountain, made by Nature, must be made over by Man. The loose earth and boulders must be welded together by concrete. The cliff which seems so unassailable must be united together so that a solid surface of hundreds of square feet is produced. And even this is not enough. The solid surface must be

continued backward for hundreds of more feet, so that it will have massiveness to add to its compactness. Think of a wall of masonry a half a mile thick, without a break! This is what we have in the Gatun Dam."

"How far is the Dam from the ocean?"

"A distance of approximately seven miles. The steamer entering the Panama Canal from the Atlantic will first pass through an artificial channel, five hundred feet in width, to Limon Bay. You can see the point on the map. At Gatun, it will be lifted by a series of three locks to the level of the artificial lake. Here it can increase its speed to that which it would maintain in an ocean voyage, if it so desires, for it will have a clear passage, unmarred by treacherous shallows or rocks, ahead of it. At the farther end of the lake, the boat will enter Bay Obispo. You can find it on the map just at the edge of Culebra. It is here where the famous Cut begins, which really represents the start of the Canal proper. The channel which it will face here will be about nine miles long, with a width at the bottom of three hundred feet. This gorge will be cut through one of the most rugged and treacherous mountains in the whole transcontinental chain from the Rockies to the Andes."

"Isn't it true," asked Rod, "that what we call the Rocky Mountains extend directly through

the Isthmus to South America?"

Stanton nodded. "Yes, the Rockies and the Andes are really the same system. In prehistoric times, they may even have extended through the Pacific Ocean along the present coast line of Central America and then have been gradually reduced by the sea. At any event, the section through which the Panama Canal is being dug, is regarded as one of the most dangerous in the whole length. Not only is it precipitous and rocky, but the soil is of such a nature that it often gives way and huge drifts or 'slides,' as we call them, sweep down the slope like an avalanche, burying everything before them. We have already had several ghastly experiences with these 'slides' at Culebra, and dozens of men have lost their lives before they could escape the danger zone. The progress of the digging on several occasions has been set back for months, and it has been necessary to begin all over again, with greater obstacles to overcome than before. In fact, it has ben necessary to keep relays of men constantly at work buliding huge walls to check the rush of earth, and even then, they have not always served as a protection. The worst of it is that there is no warning of the 'slides,' or at least not enough for the workmen to have time for flight. I don't want to be a prophet of ill, Standish, but if the mountain should show

signs of a rampage while you are at work in the 'Cut,' take the advice of an old campaigner and don't tarry to inspect the scenery! Of course, when the Canal is completed, this danger will be eliminated, but until then it can't be checked."

"Can you describe the course of the Canal from Culebra?" asked Rod.

"The end of the Cut is marked by Pedro Miguel," said Stanton. "By the way, that is pronounced down here as though it were spelled Peter Magill. Here, the boat will be lowered through a lock over thirty feet to a small lake about fifty feet above the Pacific sea level. It will continue through this body of water another mile and a half to Miraflores. Have you found the location on the map? This marks the beginning of the last stage of the journey. From here, a channel, a little over eight miles in length, will conduct the vessel into the Pacific, and it can continue its voyage."

"What will be the total cost of the Canal when it is completed?"

"At least three hundred million dollars, and possibly four hundred million."

"And when will it be finished for traffic?"

"There is no reason why it should not be completed by 1913. If that is the case, it will represent practically ten years of labor on the part of the Americans."

"There is another question I would like to ask," said Rod. "How much will it affect the present length of voyages around South America?"

"Well, the present voyage from New York to San Francisco, through the Straits of Magellan, involves a distance of nearly fourteen thousand miles. The Canal will reduce this by over half, in fact cutting off nearly eight thousand, five hundred miles.

"From New York to Yokohoma, through the Suez Canal, is a distance of over thirteen thousand, five hundred miles. The Panama waterway will shorten it by over nine thousand, eight hundred miles. So you see that a new map will be made by the Canal, both geographically and commercially. In fact, for the first time it will be possible for a ship to sail around the continent of North America."

"Will the United States Government charge a toll for the vessels using the Canal?" questioned Rod, as Stanton straightened up from the table and pushed the map toward him for future reference if he desired.

"That is a question that has not yet been answered. The Suez Canal charges a toll of a dollar a ton to ship-owners. In the course of a year, a tonnage of anywhere from 4,000,000 to 10,000,000 will pass through the Panama Canal,

and this of course, is bound in time to be greatly increased. At the same toll as the Suez Canal, this would represent a handsome revenue.

"But the Panama Canal is not being built for profit to the American Government. It is being constructed for the purpose of aiding American industries, and while, of course, foreign nations will profit from it to a certain extent, yet the great benefits will be derived directly by the people of our own country. Are there any more questions you want to ask?"

Rod passed his hand wearily over his eyes.

"Hundreds of them, but I think I will postpone them. I have heard quite enough of statistics for one day, don't you think?"

CHAPTER XXII.

Rod Meets "57."

WHEN Rod first viewed the huge iron and steel creation, labelled in the official records of the mechanical equipment of the Panama Canal as "Steam Shovel, Number 57," and realized that his hand was to control the giant dipper, which swung tons as easily as a man would swing pounds, the first misgiving since he had accepted Colonel Goethals' offer seized him. The man in overalls in charge of the shovel, a burly, black-mustached German-American, hailing from New Jersey, eyed the lad with a friendly smile as he extended his hand.

"Stanton has been telling me of you, and a chap by the name of Sterling routed me out last night to give me a string of adjectives almost as long as Culebra Cut about your good qualities. If you live up to the reputation given you by your friends, I will have a wonder for a craneman. And old fifty-seven needs one if ever a steam shovel did! We've dropped to under a thousand yards of 'spoil' a day, and even the clumsy Swede on the other side of us has made his eleven hundred! 'Fifty-seven' feels it too,

let me tell you. It's not pleasant for a respectable, hard-working steam shovel like she is to fall back among the has-beens, when she has led the whole Cut for months!"

Rod smiled. "I am afraid you will be disappointed in me. I'm a mighty green hand at the game. I don't even know the meaning of the word 'spoil' that you used just now."

The foreman chuckled. He was the kind of man who chuckles instead of laughs. Oddly enough, his name also was Chuzzlewit.

"Oh, you'll soon get used to Canal slang, Standish. 'Spoil' means dirt—just plain, ordinary dirt. If a steam shovel doesn't make eleven hundred cubic yards of it a day, she is falling below the average in the month's reports. There are some shovels that make twelve or thirteen hundred yards. Once 'Fifty-seven' ran to 1230, but she hasn't made that record again for a year. That was when she was known as the champion 'spoil digger' on the Isthmus. I'm afraid those days will never come back for her!"

And Chuzzlewit heaved a deep sigh, as though "Fifty-Seven's" failure was a blow to his own reputation.

Rod found that his day's work, as Colonel Goethals had intimated, was no sinecure. Chuzzlewit kept a keen eye on him, and was swift to shout encouragement across to him in the occa-

sional lulls of the locomotive blasts. The youth wondered if the foreman would have been so ready with his aid if Stanton and Sterling had not exerted their influence, but he was given no time to speculate on the fact. The old craneman had been retained for the week in order to "break in" his successor, and here again Rod shrewdly imagined that the influence of his friends was at work.

The little cubby-hole in the frame-work of heavy wooden beams and long projecting steel arms, which sheltered the craneman, received the full force of both the heat and the dirt. Rod saw that his predecessor was in the habit of discarding both his shirt and his under shirt, and his body was wet with glistening perspiration, which soon turned to a sooty grime.

The man kindly advised the youth to follow his example, but Rod shook his head.

"You'll come to it before you've been here a week!" was the grinning rejoinder. Indeed, before the day was over, the boy, in sheer desperation, was forced to toss his shirt down to the ground.

The constant creaking of the long arms of the machine and the heavy crunch of the big dipper as it crashed into loose boulders made Rod's head ache with a dull, grinding compression, which almost blinded him, but he resolutely fought

back the weakness, and gritted his teeth as he saw the eyes of Chuzzlewit and the craneman surveying him curiously for signs of a collapse.

The shovel was stationed at the left side of the "Cut," against a tall, steep embankment of wet, red clay, which was dislodged in huge masses as the dipper burrowed into its recesses.

On the opposite side of the shovel a long line of dirt cars was drawn up, into which the dipper deposited its load, swinging back and forth from the cliff with the precision and regularity of a gigantic pendulum. In spite of the size and power of the machine, however, a small lever in the hands of the craneman swept the dipper to almost any angle. If the clay banked outside the iron sides, as was often the case, the lever reversed the dipper with a swiftness which seemed almost human. It was in the middle of the morning that a struggle with an eighteen-ton boulder showed Rod the full ingenuity of the machine.

The heavy rock had been swung safely onto the car and the dipper was on its return circuit when the boulder, rolling over on its side like a sleepy man aroused out of a sound slumber, slid toward the ground. A sharp clutch at the craneman's lever brought the dipper back almost instantly and it crashed against the boulder with a force which checked it almost on the edge of the car. A second time, the dipper repeated the

blow, and the boulder slowly yielded to the impact. But the battle was not over. A third time, the heavy rock and the heavier iron collided. Ponderously, laboriously, the boulder rolled toward its original position. The dipper hung suspended in the air, swinging slowly back and forth, as though seeking for the proper vantage point at which to renew its attack, then abruptly it descended on the side of the rock with a smashing impetus which sent a great shower of sparks dancing out into the smoke swirl from a passing engine. The boulder could not resist such an enemy. It completed its last revolution and brought short up on the center of the clay, firmly imbedded.

"That is what I call a battle of giants," the craneman commented as the dipper swung back into the cliff.

"Do you have those often?" Rod asked.

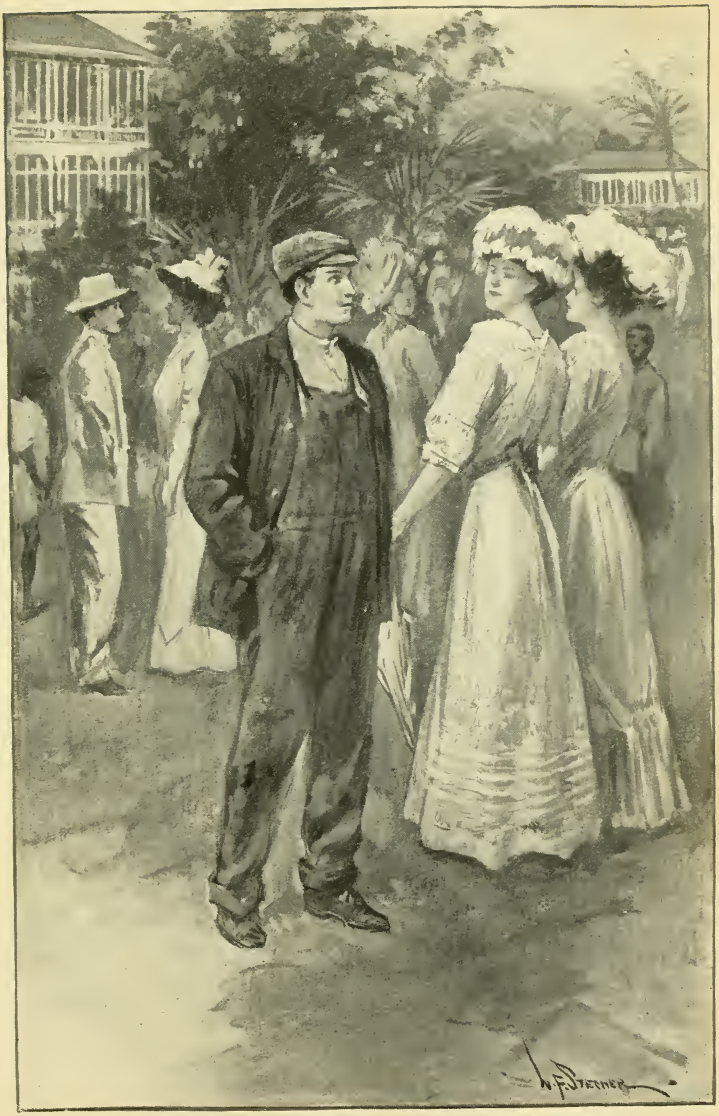
"We had a harder one than that yesterday. But 'Fifty-seven' lost out—the lid of the dipper was loose. Once she raised a twenty-one ton rock, and it toppled over onto the track before the dipper could get back to it. There was a little Frenchman passing at the time, and he stopped to watch the fun. He had never seen a steam shovel work before. I shouted to him, but he didn't understand English."

"What happened?"

"They amputated his leg at the Culebra hospital that afternoon. The boulder smashed it almost to a jelly."

The month that followed gave Rod a wholesome respect for "Fifty-seven's" powers. The great shovel seemed not so much a creation of iron and steel as a creature of flesh and blood, with human understanding in its monster arms and massive dipper. It might have been one of the weird giants of the prehistoric age, transported thousands of years forward to aid Man in his wonder-working. A sort of curious affection began to rise in the boy for the huge machine. He found himself entering into the rivalry of the Cut with all of the zest of an old-timer, and watching the figures of the excavation, as they were bulletined each week at the government Y. M. C. A. club houses, with the real enthusiasm of the "Big Ditch."

When "Fifty-seven" reached eleven hundred yards one day, and Chuzzlewit solemnly removed his battered hat and shook the boy's hand, the rough praise was among the most gratifying that Rod had ever received. In that week "Fifty-seven" tore six thousand and two hundred yards from the red-and-yellow cliff. Chuzzlewit's attitude toward the machine was curious to see. While a few weeks before he had been upbraiding the crew with all of the force of his mixed



And noted the curious glances of the well-dressed women.

German and modern American slang, and bestowing disgusted glances of disdain at the dipper as he aided in the day's overhauling, now he patted the long arms lovingly and wielded the oil can with as much care and enthusiasm as a jockey grooming a favorite horse. "Fifty-seven" had redeemed herself. And Chuzzlewit opened his heart and took her back into his esteem and affection. When a transfer to another section of Culebra was suggested to him at an increased wage, he spurned the offer with as much hauteur as a soldier, asked to desert his flag.

The month did much for Rod in several directions. It hardened his muscles and brought a new buoyancy and elasticity to his step and a new alertness to his eye. He learned to think and act quickly, and was already shaking off much of the sense of dependency which had been with him in college. The dirt and smoke were disagreeable, even more so than the youth had been led to expect, but the very fact of the unpleasantness and the necessity of bearing it, brought out new qualities of determination in the boy. Even when he trudged home in the evening, with his face and hands blackened, and every pore of his body seemingly filled with grime, and noted the curious glances of the well-dressed women of the officers' families, the hot flush of rebellion which

would have swept him six weeks ago was conquered. The youth merely stiffened his shoulders and closed his lips and walked on with as much erectness as though he were attired in the jaunty clothes of his college days. And as a matter of fact, an hour later affected a revolution in his appearance.

It was Rod's custom to visit the shower-bath of the Y. M. C. A. each evening, and after a vigorous scrubbing with hot water and tar soap from head to foot, to switch on the cold stream until his body tingled with the shock. Then discarding his overalls and "jumper," he resumed the clothes he had brought from home, taking care to keep them well pressed through the medium of a small tip to a colored porter. When he stepped out of the building, those who had seen the begrimed craneman enter it would never have recognized that person in the well-groomed, well set-up young fellow in the college-cut clothes that left it.

The problem of how he should spend his nights, Rod had fancied would be an irritating one, and he had anticipated long periods of lonesomeness and inactivity, unless he should undertake to keep up with his college course by home study. This last he soon found, was a greater tax on his strength than he could stand, but it was not hard to find a substitute for his books. The

government, he found, had erected four Y. M. C. A. club houses on the Isthmus for the express purpose of occupying the men's evenings, going on the maxim that if a man, like a boy, plays well, he will work well. The club buildings were fitted with gymnasiums, pool and billiard rooms, reading and game rooms, and well-stocked circulating libraries. Even soda-water fountains and cigar and news stands were installed, and the men were encouraged to bring their wives or sweethearts with them when they desired. A series of lectures, moving-picture shows and concerts was inaugurated. Basketball and baseball tournaments were arranged, and it was not long before Rod found himself entering into the spirit of these matches with enthusiasm.

Rod seldom saw Sterling. The lieutenant had been transferred to Ancon, the American suburb of the city of Panama, and during his occasional runs to Culebra Rod was generally busy at the "Cut." In fact, their first meeting after the youth's entrance on his duties as craneman, was nearly two weeks later. Rod surveyed his friend uncertainly. He chanced to have just come from the shower bath, and his appearance was as spick and span as even that of the immaculate Sterling. The latter took the initiative. Crossing the room with a quick stride, he grasped both of Rod's hands with a heartiness which left no doubt of his

sincerity, and pumped them up and down as he burst out, "I have been hearing great things of you, old man!"

"How?" Rod asked in surprise.

"Well, to tell the truth, the Chief seems to have a weather eye on you, my boy. He has his own ways of getting information, and this afternoon when I stopped at his office for orders, he told me all about you and Chuzzlewit and old 'Fifty-seven.' When you have the Colonel interested in you, old man, to the extent that he makes personal inquiries as to your record, you can order an extra-sized hat. But I say, Standish, you don't look much like a craneman on a steam-shovel!"

Rod laughed. "Do you think because I am covered with grime eight hours of the day, I should not make an effort to look like a respectable citizen the other sixteen? But I'm just a craneman, Sterling; a plain, ordinary craneman, and to tell the truth, old man, I am beginning to be proud of the fact!"

Sterling stared. "You are a rum chap, Standish. I would have classed your work as among the impossible things for a man like you or me to do a couple of weeks ago. I'm afraid I showed that fact rather too plainly when the Colonel gave you the chance. But really, old man, you are giving me a new idea of things. I have put

in a lot of solid thinking since I saw you, and, and—I want to apologize, old man, for my coldness! You have taught me a lesson!"

"Incidentally, I have learned one myself," Rod laughed.

"By the way," continued Sterling, "I met a friend of yours in Panama the other day."

"A friend of mine?"

Sterling grinned. "You are a sly dog, Standish! Why didn't you tell me that you knew Edith Arnold; that you had saved her life, and all that? Do you know there isn't a young chap on the force who wouldn't give his boots to occupy the place in that girl's estimation that you do! And yet you value it so lightly that you don't even write an inquiry as to her welfare. I declare, Standish, you need someone like myself to apply the spur. I am really ashamed of you!"

Rod turned toward a notice of a basket-ball game pasted on the wall, and assumed a deep and sudden interest in its contents.

"That's all well enough, Sterling, but Edith Arnold is not interested in me. You forget that I am a laborer, and she is the daughter of the presiding judge of Panama. I haven't quite lost my common sense yet, Sterling."

The lieutenant's hand descended so heartily on his back that Rod turned involuntarily, revealing a very red and confused face.

"I knew it!" cried Sterling, triumphantly. "You can't deceive me, you beggar! That Yankee pride of yours has saturated your system so that you are eating your heart out rather than make an advance. So you are afraid you would be presuming, eh? Well, that is rich!"

Rod stiffened. "I may as well tell you that Miss Arnold's father and her future husband tried to pay me for what I did for her—in money! When they view me on that plane, do you think I am going to try to force myself on her?"

Sterling whistled. "You must be mistaken, old man. That prig of a Sutton might have done that, but Judge Arnold never. I would stake my reputation on that. And as for his being the promised husband of Miss Edith, he is no more so than I am. She holds him in as much contempt as I do."

Rod's eyes lowered and he tapped the floor restlessly. "If you have not eaten yet, Sterling, let's have supper together," he suggested, lamely. With a curious smile, the lieutenant fell into step at his side.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Treachery.

WHO started the name Rod never knew. He first heard it one evening when he and Chuzzlewit, having put "Fifty-seven" in order for the night, were leaving the cliff for the mouth of the "Cut." The two had reached the nearest railroad track, when a hoarse voice from behind them raised itself in a mocking shout:

"There goes the 'Duke,' boys! Better take a good look at him. He's a real celebrity in the Chief's office!"

It was not until he had turned that Rod saw that the appellation was directed to himself. The next moment he regretted his glance backward. A group of perhaps half a dozen men were trudging down the rails in their direction, whom he recognized at once as the crews of two neighboring steam-shovels. All of them were grinning broadly, and, as they caught his questioning stare, the man who had raised the shout sang out mockingly, "That's the young gent, mates, who had his job handed to him on a silver platter, and whose friends are afraid that he will soil his pretty white hands! Isn't he handsome! But you ought to see him in the evening, after

he gets on those swell clothes of his that he brought from the 'States.' You would think he was the Colonel's private secretary. Oh, he's the candy boy all right!"

Chuzzlewit gripped Rod by the arm. "Don't answer, lad. They've been watching their chance for a week to get at you."

"To get at me?" Rod repeated, in amazement. "Why?"

Chuzzlewit flushed. "Well, you see, they're not used to your ways. They can't understand why you spruce up a bit at night. They think you're putting yourself above them. And then —"

"Well, out with it!" Rod smiled.

Chuzzlewit hesitated. "I'm not much on putting things in a nice way, youngster, like you are, but it's been sort of noised around the 'Cut' that Colonel Goethals gave you a job as a special favor, and someone has started the story that you're here as, as—oh, hang it all, Sterling! Can't you see what I'm driving at?"

"No, I can't say that I do!" Rod threw his arm suddenly over the other's shoulders. "I only know that you are trying to spare my feelings, and you're a brick, Chuzzlewit, to think of that. But don't you think I'm man enough to take what you have to say straight from the shoulder?"

"All right, lad. I reckon after all that's the best way. You see, the men in the Cut have been told that you have been sent to spy on them and carry tales to the Chief! There, I've said it!"

"A spy!" Rod stammered. "A spy!"

"Of course, I know it's all nonsense," Chuzzlewit said hastily, "and I almost came to blows myself the other night with that chap Hardwick, who shouted at you! He's the worst of the lot, and prides himself on having the hardest fist on the Isthmus."

For a few moments the two continued their way in silence toward the Y. M. C. A. clubhouse. It was Chuzzlewit who spoke finally, and his question brought a sudden frown to Rod's face.

"Have you ever thought that you might have an enemy here, Standish, who would go out of his way to see you in trouble?"

"Of course not!" Rod answered, emphatically. "What made you ask that?"

"Are you quite sure?" Chuzzlewit continued earnestly. "Do you know a slim, dark-haired chap, who wears an eye-glass like a dude and carries a walking stick?"

"Sutton!" Rod cried in amazement, a light suddenly breaking in on him. "But I hardly think that he would stoop to —"

"I saw him talking to Hardwick last week," Chuzzlewit said, significantly, "and he had a yellow bill in his hand that he was holding mighty careless-like for a man with pockets!"

Rod digested the information with a tightening of his lips. Chuzzlewit changed the subject abruptly with a shrewd glance at the youth's troubled face, and neither referred to it again during the balance of the evening. Rod found himself unable to forget it, however. Even a spirited game of basket-ball failed to remove the suggestion from his mind, and when he turned in that night, he laid awake for a full hour, staring into the darkness, with a picture of Wingrave Sutton's mocking face scowling into his own.

It was the second evening following, that the encounter with Hardwick was followed by another, which came to a sharp and disagreeable climax. The lad had lingered behind after the day's work to assist Chuzzlewit in overhauling and oiling the engine, and when they started homeward the "Cut" was almost deserted. The two had hardly made a dozen yards, however, when three men stepped out suddenly from behind a line of dirt cars and barred their path. The foremost of the trio was Hardwick, and it was evident from his first words that he had lain in wait for their coming.

"If you'll take a friendly tip, Chuzzlewit," he

began, blusteringly, "you will lose no time in getting up the hill to supper! My mates and I have a few words that we would like to say to that helper of yours!"

Chuzzlewit spread his feet apart. "Oh, I'm in no hurry, Hardwick. And as long as the youngster is in my crew, I think I'll wait and hear what the trouble is!"

Hardwick advanced with clenched fists. It was plain from his flushed face that he had been drinking. "Don't say I didn't warn you. We have no fight with you, Chuzzlewit. But I'm going to give that lad of yours the worst lesson a spy ever had in Panama!"

"That's the way to talk, Dick!" growled one of the men at his shoulders. "And we're here to help you!"

Chuzzlewit darted a swift glance back along the lines of glistening metals and empty gondolas, ready for the morning loading. There was not a person in sight. The ruffians could not have picked a better time for their purpose.

"Oh, we won't be disturbed!" grinned Hardwick, divining the cause of the other's scrutiny. "But we have an engagement soon with a gentleman, whom we wouldn't care to keep waiting, eh, boys? Are you going to stand aside, Chuzzlewit, or do you want a taste of what's coming to the youngster?"

Rod stepped suddenly past his friend until he faced the speaker. The man was slightly above his own height and perhaps twenty pounds heavier. But late carousals had seamed his face, and the youth shrewdly suspected that most of his weight was flabby flesh in spite of his outdoor life.

"May I make a proposition, Mr. Hardwick?" he said quietly. "Your grievance is against me personally. Will I have your assurance that if we fight this out, man to man, that your friends will not molest either one of us when we are through?"

For a moment Hardwick stared in almost ludicrous surprise. It was his companions who answered the question for him.

"That's an easy enough proposition, Dick!" laughed the man who had spoken before. "Since the 'Duke' is game enough to propose a fight, accommodate him. It won't be so much like wringing a bantam's neck! Yes, we'll stand back, lad, and give you a fair show."

"I protest!" Chuzzlewit cried, angrily. "A fair show, indeed! Do you think —"

Red quietly divested himself of his coat and hat, and extended them to his friend. "There is no use of further argument, Mr. Chuzzlewit. You all know that this has been forced on me."

Hardwick growled something inaudible, and

likewise tossed off his coat. "None of your fancy rules go, I'll tell you in advance, young man. This is to be a straight fight to a finish, do you understand?"

Rod nodded as he placed himself on guard.

"Remember, lad, if you need help, don't hesitate to sing out! Jim Chuzzlewit never went back on a friend yet!"

Rod had no opportunity for response. Almost immediately Hardwick sprang forward, with his fists waving and his hot, flushed face scowling at the sight of the cool, determined demeanor of his antagonist.

Rod deftly side-stepped, but even as his right hand was raised for a passing blow, Hardwick whirled with a surprising agility and caught the youth under the chin with a force which lifted him over the rails and sent him sprawling. Rod went to his knees, but threw himself beyond Hardwick's onslaught barely in time to escape a second blow. He was conscious that a thin thread of blood was trickling between his clenched teeth and that Hardwick's companions were guffawing at the sight. His opponent turned and sprang back at him before he was fairly erect, but this time the lad was prepared. His old boxing lessons at "Tech" were coming into excellent play. Hardwick fought, clearly relying on brute force rather than skill. No one appreciated the

fact more vividly than Rod, that if one of his flying blows met him squarely he would go down like a log. Hardwick was already breathing heavily, while apparently his boy opponent was scarcely winded. The fight was developing into a pitting of dissipation against clean-living. Hardwick was realizing this fact, and the realization increased the energy of his onslaught, as though determined to end the affair without delay.

Sensing the other's condition, Rod purposely redoubled his activity, springing first on one side of the heavy body before him and then on the other, and compelling Hardwick to turn like a pivot to protect himself. Twice the youth reached the other's face. Rod realized, with a sinking of his heart, however, that the vicious blows which he had received at the outset were rapidly sapping his own energy. He swayed dizzily and only mastered himself by a superhuman effort. He recovered his equilibrium with something of the bulldog grit he had shown on the gridiron in his college days, and a sudden clearing of his brain as he saw that it was now or never if he would win. The youth poised himself for an instant, and then, measuring the distance, threw his strength into an abrupt, clean-cut blow. The man threw his arms wildly over his head as though fighting for breath, and fell prostrate.

Rod glanced down at the motionless figure in a daze. Then abruptly the scene whirled about him in a fantastic circle, and he realized that Chuzzlewit had him in his arms and he was grinning stupidly. A far away voice was sounding faintly in his ear, but it was not unitl it had repeated itself that he knew it was Chuzzlewit who was speaking.

"Brace up, youngster! D'ye hear! This will never do! Now then, forward, march! Hay foot, straw foot—there we are! Bravo! We'll make it yet!"

The enforced exercise did the lad good. Afterward, Chuzzlewit solemnly affirmed that it was all which kept him from fainting. Hardwick still lay, limp and silent, between the rails, with his companions frantically endeavoring to restore his senses, and too absorbed to continue the attack had they been so minded. It was not until Rod and Chuzzlewit reached the summit of the bluff—an ascent which Rod made like a man in a nightmare—that the boy's brain cleared sufficiently for him to walk upright.

"Did I win?" he panted.

"You did!" Chuzzlewit answered, emphatically, and then added, gloomily, "But I am afraid that one victory will never finish a man like Hardwick!"

He was right, although it was nearing the end

of the week before physical proof came of the correctness of his prophecy. The next morning Hardwick's place at the steam-shovel was filled by a substitute, but the second day he trudged surlily by "Fifty-seven" with a bandaged head and without vouchsafing a reply to Chuzzlewit's cheery "Good morning." The encounter in the "Cut" had not become public property. Adverse as he was to publicity, it did not need Chuzzlewit's arguments for Rod to keep silence, if only in the hope of avoiding further trouble. The youth was hidden in his perch over the dipper when Hardwick passed, and although he caught sight of the man on the following day on the way to work, his late antagonist managed to avoid a meeting.

It was early on Saturday when Rod reached "Fifty-seven" a trifle later than his usual hour, that he found Chuzzlewit bending over the engine with the most emphatic scowl that he had ever seen on his friend's face.

"Anything wrong?" the youth queried.

Without glancing up, Chuzzlewit rejoined sharply, "Are you sure, Standish, that you placed the tarpaulin right last night?"

"Absolutely! Since you cautioned me of its importance, I have never missed doing so since I began work. Why?"

"Only because I found the canvas off when I

got here this morning and the engine rusted so that it will need a good half day to repair it!"

It was not until noon that "Fifty-seven" was ready for business, in spite of Chuzzlewit's most strenuous exertions. Rod assisted the foreman's labors silently, conscious that a coolness had sprung up between them, and that Chuzzlewit was more than half-tempted to berate him for what he evidently deemed inexcusable carelessness. When the two left for the night, Chuzzlewit himself personally attended to the buckling of the heavy tarpaulin.

On Monday morning, Rod was the first at the shovel. The canvas was still in the position where Chuzzlewit had left it. With a sigh the youth climbed to his position on the shovel and pressed the series of controlling levers to test the machinery. The heavy dipper, however, did not move. From the ground Chuzzlewit was staring upward in bewilderment. Rod attempted the operation again, with no better results than before. He climbed down and motioned his superior to take his place. A moment later Chuzzlewit was on the earth beside him, and, to Rod's surprise, extending his hand.

"I have to apologize, Standish!"

"Apologize? For what?

"I thought you responsible for the engine's rusting last week, and now I know better!"

Rod stared.

"The same hand that removed the tarpaulin, Standish," said Chuzzlewit, grimly, "has been tampering with the levers! Someone has been here during the night and has deliberately tried to wreck 'Fifty-seven'!"

The full extent of the damage was not revealed until an hour's investigation had shown that a full two days' repairs would be needed to bring the shovel back to its working standard. It was a grim-faced Chuzzlewit who watched the dipper burrow its way into the clay bank on the third morning following. When Rod descended for dinner, he found that Chuzzlewit had brought his lunch with him, and was slowly lifting out the contents of a square bucket.

"I don't intend to leave 'Fifty-seven' again until I find the gentleman who is responsible for her misfortune!" said the foreman decisively.

Rod seated himself by his side. "Can you spare me one of those sandwiches? I'll keep you company!"

When the day's work was over Rod left Chuzzlewit apparently tinkering with the engine, and made his way to the government club-house as usual. An hour later he was on his way back, with a heavily filled basket on his arm. The two retired to the shadow of the cliff for their supper, and then Chuzzlewit filled his pipe and Rod

opened a copy of Scott's "Quentin Durward," which he had stowed into his pocket. The darkness of the tropical night descended two hours later, and Chuzzlewit curled himself up by the dipper, while the youth rolled himself in a blanket on the ground. But morning came without alarm. The would-be wreckers of "Fifty-seven" had not returned.

The two repeated their tactics the next night with no better success. On the third day Chuzzlewit left Rod on guard and attended to the foraging himself. When he returned from Culebra, in addition to his basket, a short length of rubber hose was coiled over his arm.

"A little surprise for our friends when they finally decide to pay us a visit." Chuzzlewit leaned over the boiler, chuckling. "By the way, Standish, I think we may as well keep steam up to-night!"

"Steam?" Red queried, in surprise.

Chuzzlewit fumbled with the hose without answering. He straightened up suddenly, with his hand on a valve of the boiler. The next moment a hot, angry cloud of white vapor spurted out over the track. Chuzzlewit watched it with a grin, and then gently turned the valve back and dropped the hose by the boiler.

"I rather think we can give our visitors a warm reception now, don't you?"

Rod laughed like a school-boy on a lark. "What made you think of it?"

"I guess it was an inspiration!" Chuzzlewit grinned, spreading out their supper. "I was wondering just how we would meet the enemy if they happened to be armed, and the throbbing of the boiler seemed to answer that old 'Fifty-seven' could take care of herself if we gave her the opportunity!"

"It will be too bad if we don't have a chance to test a plan as good as that."

"Oh, we'll have the chance!" Chuzzlewit replied, confidently.

Rod packed the remnants of the supper back into the basket for the next morning's meal, and Chuzzlewit stretched himself out on the ground and thoughtfully filled his pipe. "What do you say to another chapter of 'Quentin Durward,' lad? We were just finishing the sixth chapter last night. That chap, Scott, can certainly tell a corking good yarn!"

Rod smiled at the other's rough praise, and opened his worn volume. The boy's low-toned voice and the smoke of Chuzzlewit's pipe mingled for the next hour. Then the lad laid aside his book and Chuzzlewit knocked the ashes from his brier, and the long night's vigil began.

Once Rod awoke with a sudden start to find Chuzzlewith propped up on his elbow, with his

hand to his eyes, staring out into the blue-black darkness. But the silence was unbroken, and the youth dropped his head, to drift off a few moments later into a fitful, restless sleep.

It was perhaps an hour later that the boy struggled back to a realization of his surroundings again. Chuzzlewit had slipped over to his side and was gently shaking him by the shoulder.

"Hush!" he whispered warningly.

Rod followed his pointing finger in the direction of the track. But his eyes, strange to the darkness, could make out nothing.

The youth stooped to his knees so that his lips were on a level with Chuzzlewit's ear. "What is it?" he asked, guardedly.

"There are two men over there watching us!" was the startling reply.

Rod subsided into silence, with his eyes strained forward into the night with every nerve tense.

Chuzzlewith drew him down to his knees again. "Can you worm you way over to the boiler, lad?"

Rod nodded.

"Keep flat on your stomach," Chuzzlewit continued, tersely. "If they once sight your figure over the edge of the shovel, they'll probbaly chance it and rush us!"

"Are there only two of them?"

"I wouldn't be surprised if there were half a

dozen," Chuzzlewit whispered, grimly. "I have left the hose attached and the steam up. When I whistle, let them have it hard! Do you understand—hard! We are dealing with desperate men, Standish, and there is no time for sentiment!"

Rod pressed the other's hand silently, and, slipping over the edge of the shovel, began his snake-like advance forward. Midway in his cautious path he paused and listened. There was something almost ominous in the heavy, brooding silence. A sudden fear of the unseen seized him and he gripped his hands hard. If the darkness would only lift so he could see! And then he realized that if the blackness was a peril, it was also a protection. He clenched his teeth and squirmed onward until he felt the cold, iron edge of the shovel under his fingers. A quick, silent effort and he would be over, with the boiler less than two feet away. And then, abruptly, a sharp, shrill whistle from behind him cut the darkness.

Casting concealment to the winds, Rod vaulted over the shovel and fumbled for the boiler-valve. From the tracks he saw a thin line of shadowy, crouching figures, one of which raised an angry shout at the sight of the youth's form against the sky. The shout steadied Rod's groping fingers like a dash of cold water. With the valve in his

left hand, he caught the nozzle of the hose with his right and levelled it at the indistinct figures ahead.

The next instant there was a sharp spurt of escaping steam, like the hiss of an angry snake, and the stinging, blinding cloud of vapor caught the assailants of "Fifty-seven" squarely in the face. For a moment they staggered wildly in the path of the steam, as though unable to realize the nature of the strange weapon that had been turned against them.

"Give it to them!" Chuzzlewit shouted, hoarsely. "I hope our visitors are enjoying our warm welcome!" Then raising a sledge-hammer, he brought it down against the heavy iron of the dipper with a crash that echoed wildly over against the opposite cliff. Its effect, after the hours of silence, was almost deafening. It was the one factor needed to complete the flight of the enemy. With shrill cries of terror and dismay, they broke into ignominious rout. It all happened so quickly that Rod was still holding the hose without a thought of shutting off the valve when Chuzzlewit sprang to his side.

"You're wasting our ammunition, lad!" he grinned. "There's not one of our friends within a hundred yards of us by this time!"

"Do you think they will return?" Rod questioned, dubiously.

"Not those gentlemen! You couldn't get one of them near 'Fifty-seven' again after dark for a hundred dollar bill!"

Rod joined Chuzzlewit on the edge of the shovel, with his feet drumming musingly against the side.

"Did you recognize any of them?" he asked, abruptly.

Chuzzlewit hesitated. "I wouldn't care to swear to it on the witness stand, but if there is a vacancy in the morning in the shovel-crew at our right, I won't be surprised!"

"You mean Hardwick?"

"Unless I am greatly mistaken, he was the leader of our assailants!" was the emphatic rejoinder.

And so it proved. The next day Hardwick's place was empty, and there was no word from the missing man. Chuzzlewit glanced significantly at Rod as the rumor spread around the "Cut" at the noon hour.

"Do you think we had better make a report to Headquarters?" the youth asked.

"That is just what I was about to suggest, Standish, but you'll have to attend to that part of it. If you will put it into the proper words, we will draw up a statement to-night."

The report was duly prepared and dispatched, and Rod breathed a sigh of relief. Hardwick,

however, had evidently made good his escape. A search of his room revealed the fact that he had returned for his baggage, probably taking the first train for the coast.

"About this English chap—I think you told me his name was Sutton," Chuzzlewit said, curiously, one evening. "Did you ever suspect his connection with the affair?"

Rod shook his head. "What's the use? We couldn't prove it, and, anyway, he failed. Let's forget it!"

Chuzzlewit smoked for a moment in silence. "Well, it's your fight, youngster!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Big Slide at Culebra.

IT was three weeks later that Rod saw Derrick Sterling again. The youth was crouching on the craneman's platform of "Fifty-seven," engrossed in the dipper's plunge into the huge hole in the cliff, which had grown from the size of a rabbit's borrow to a cavern of substantial proportions. Chuzzlewit was standing at the end of a waiting "dirt" car, thoughtfully contemplating its contents and wondering if the next trip of the shovel would finish it. As the dipper swung out from the clay-bank Rod leaned over from his platform to watch the unloading. But on the instant he lost all interest in "Fifty-seven."

One of the railroad motor cars had come to a pause opposite the shovel, and the group of passengers was descending to the ground to obtain a closer view of the operations of the dipper. There were four of them—Lieutenant Derrick Sterling, Judge Arnold, Wingrave Sutton, and a young lady. After one glance at her, the other members of the party lost all interest for the lad. She was Edith Arnold.

A shout from Chuzzlewit abruptly called Rod back to a sense of his forgotten duties. The lad mechanically swung the dipper into the car and pressed the lever, which released its contents. He was suddenly conscious that the day's grime had been worse than usual and that his face and hands were daubed with clay. He darted a stealthy glance at the girl's white dress and gloved hands. Her spotless attire would be ruined by one touch of his greasy overalls! Then abruptly his mood changed and he whirled the dipper back to the cliff with an instinctive straightening of his shoulders. Even if he *was* a craneman, he was making one of the best records in the "Cut!" And after all, "Fifty-seven" was a machine to be proud of, even if she did cover him with oil and clay!

And probably the girl didn't intend to speak anyway. Her curiosity would be satisfied, and the party would continue their way. Unless Sterling had told them, they could scarcely recognize him under his grease.

But the next moment showed him that Edith Arnold had not stopped merely for a view of the machine. She continued over toward the shovel until she stood almost under it, and then she shaded her eyes with her hand and stared up at him. Rod's gaze turned from the cliff, and their eyes met.

"Hello, there!" she cried, merrily.

"Hello!" Rod responded, awkwardly.

"Can you come down and see your friends?" the girl continued. Rod glanced toward Chuzzlewit. The big foreman was chuckling softly to himself at the end of the car.

"Of course he can, miss! Get out of there, Standish, while I climb up and take your place."

Rod inwardly felt like kicking Chuzzlewit with a hearty good will. But there was nothing else for it. Wiping his hands across his overalls, he cast a last regretful look at the dipper and slowly descended.

Edith Arnold swept her eyes over his figure, and then gravely extended her hand. Rod gazed at it in confusion.

"Don't you shake hands with your friends, Mr. Standish?"

"I—I am afraid I would soil your dress, Miss Arnold."

The girl impatiently dug her parasol into the ground.

"It is really getting tiresome keeping my arm extended, and I imagine rather ridiculous."

Rod again wiped his palm on his overalls, and, with a sigh of submission, gingerly grasped the delicate hand.

"There, that is better, although your grip, sir, was far from hearty. Do you realize that you

have made me take this trip clear from Ancon because you were not gallant enough to come to me?"

"Really, Miss Arnold, you do me an injustice. Surely —"

"You are not at all good at debating, for a college man, Mr. Standish," the girl interrupted, laughing. "Father, I have cornered the reprobate at last. Come over here and give me the benefit of your legal advice as to what I shall say to him."

The other members of the party were already picking their way over the tracks. Sterling's face wore a broad grin as he glanced from Rod's begrimed figure to the scowling face of Sutton.

Rod shifted awkwardly from one foot to the other, and under his soot he could feel that he was flushing as red as a girl. Chuzzlewit stopped the operations of "Fifty-seven" long enough to peer down from his perch and indulge in another of his soft chuckles.

Then abruptly the tension was shattered. From the cliff behind a heavy roar burst forth like the rumble of a great volley of artillery. It echoed over against the opposite side of the "Cut," and was flung back like the bellow of an angry giant. For an instant the party stood spellbound, fascinated, rooted to the spot. The hum of labor ceased as abruptly as the snapping

of an electric button. The engineer of the "dirt" train was the first to spring into action.

Jumping from his cab he darted down the "Cut," waving his arms like a man demented, and shouting over and over again:

"A slide! A slide! Run for your lives, boys! Run for your lives!"

Chuzzlewit sprang from "Fifty-seven," reckless of the distance from the ground, and raced after him. Of the group about Rod, Sutton was the first to follow. Flinging away his walking stick, the Englishman darted wildly down the track, whimpering like a child. Judge Arnold turned toward his daughter, but Sterling had already caught her arm and was half-dragging, half-leading her over the rough, uneven ground.

Rod flashed a glance upward at the scowling face of the cliff, down which a cloud of pebbles and dirt was already sweeping as though hurled by a monster broom. Then he dashed to Sterling's side.

But it was not the lieutenant that needed his aid. It was Judge Arnold. The latter's age was already telling on him, and he was gasping for breath. Rod seized his arm and shoved him roughly ahead as he reached the last of the series of tracks.

A sudden, hoarse cry of pain behind brought him sharply around. What he saw was engraven

on his memory with a force that was never erased. Sterling's foot had caught in a rail and the lieutenant had sprawled heavily to the ground, unable to rise. Edith Arnold had been borne down with him, and she lay silent and motionless at his side. From the cliff the volume of the "slide" was already increasing, so that it seemed as though its whole scarred face was spouting forth a shower of debris.

And in its path were the two helpless figures of the man and the girl, powerless to move a foot to drag themselves from the awful death above them.

Judge Arnold had not heard the lieutenant's cry. He had kept on mechanically and was already beyond the danger zone. Rod hesitated, debating his chances. Then he whirled and darted backward toward the forms of Sterling and Edith. The lieutenant glanced up with a sudden grimace of pain as he reached them.

"Save her, Standish! You won't have time for both of us. Hurry, man, for God's sake!"

Rod picked up the unconscious body of Edith. The girl's head had struck on a rail, and an ugly gash showed in her temple. He had scarcely paused, even in the raising of the girl's form. No more than thirty seconds could have elapsed since he had started on his backward course, but it was a question of seconds.

The youth estimated that fifty yards ahead would place his burden in safety. The Judge had come to a halt now, fully aware of the situation he had missed. Rod waved him back as the latter started toward him. He could save Edith and himself with a margin. That was now certain. But would he have time to drag Sterling from the path of the rocks? He could not let the lieutenant die like that. *He would not!*

Rod was hardly conscious when he dropped Edith's form into her father's arms and raced back on his second trip. He did not dare glance at the raging face of the mountain. He needed every ounce of his strength for the ordeal before him.

Sterling had collapsed when he reached him. The pain and suspense had nearly overcome him. A dumb expression of bewilderment crossed his face when he saw Rod bending over him, and he made a feeble gesture of resistance.

But the youth did not answer him. Placing his hands under his waist he lifted him bodily. How he blessed the six weeks' training on the steam-shovel which had made his muscles like steel!

It was hard work making progress under such a load; hard and slow work. But Rod bent his head and staggered onward. His head was roaring, a red haze swam before his eyes, and his

knees felt like lead. He was dimly conscious that some one was shouting to him. And then there was a crash as though all of the Inferno had suddenly loosed itself. A sudden haze of darkness and he staggered blindly forward and knew no more!

CHAPTER XXV.

A Girl Intervenes.

WHEN Rod opened his eyes a cheering beam of sunshine was playing over his face and trying to touch his hair. His hand reached out weakly and touched a white coverlet. The surprise of the discovery revived him, and he raised his head painfully. It was true. He was lying in a bed, and the neat, white walls showed that it was a hospital ward.

The trim figure of a blue-capped nurse at his side rose from the chair at the bed and pressed a soothing hand over his aching brow.

"Do you feel better now?"

"Where am I?" the boy demanded, fitfully.

The girl hesitated. Then she said, briefly, "You are in a room at the Ancon hospital. You have been here nearly a week, ever since the 'Big Slide' at Culebra."

"A week?" Rod repeated, wonderingly.

The nurse nodded, smiling.

"Your head received a bad cut when you fell, and they had to operate. But you are doing nicely now—very nicely."

"Where is Mr. Sterling and the others? Did —did —"

The nurse caught his uncompleted question and shook her head cheerily. "No, they were not killed. When you collapsed Mr. Sterling fell in front of you. The edge of the 'slide' just grazed your heels. Three feet less and I am afraid there would have been no need of the hospital. But I am talking too much. If the Doctor heard me he would scold. I have answered your questions. Now, take this for me."

Rod gulped down the brown liquid under his lips and closed his eyes wearily. When he opened them again he had the heavy sensation of having slept for a long time.

The nurse had been changed, and with her was a gray-haired, kindly-faced man, whose eyes were strangely dimmed as he gazed down at the wan face on the pillow.

"Is that you, Judge?" Rod asked eagerly.

Judge Arnold bent over him with a swift expression of relief. "Thank God, my boy, you are saved at last! We have had a fearful battle to keep you with us, and we have won."

"Have I been as bad as that?"

"You have been very far into the Valley of the Shadows, I fear, but you have returned to us. Now, not another word. Edith is doing splendidly. In fact, she was only in bed a day. Mr.

Sterling is nursing a broken ankle in the next room, and I am a sort of a God-father to you all."

It was a week later that Rod was sufficiently recovered to be propped up in a huge arm-chair in a bulwark of pillows. He had just finished his first hearty meal, after the monotonous soft diet that the nurse had served to him with a stonily unsympathetic face, when the door opened to admit the smiling face of Judge Arnold.

The Judge looked strangely awkward and ill at ease. Rod noticed it with the shrewdness of an invalid and gazed at him curiously as he took the seat at his side.

"I have a business proposition to make you, my boy, and it is worrying me. This is the very first chance that I have had to unburden myself, and I am taking it. I am going to send you back to the States! You are to enter the Christmas term at "Tech," and I think, by a moderate amount of extra study, you will be able to graduate in another year with your class."

Rod gazed up at the Judge's wrinkled face stupidly.

"But, Judge Arnold, that is impossible."

"Why?"

"I have no money, and besides —"

"You are to accept the money as a loan from me! Now, please don't protest!" the Judge broke off as Rod shook his head. "I appreciate

your independence and all that, but you have reached a point where you must think of your future. With a diploma from 'Tech' as a full-fledged engineer, you can return to the Canal and command a position that would be impossible to you now, and which would make it very easy for you to pay back the funds which I may advance. And there will still be plenty of work for you to do at the Canal. The Gatun Dam, for instance, and a dozen other big features for the trained engineer to cope with. You must act as a business man now, Rod."

Rod gazed out of the window at the long green stretch of lawn below.

"Give me a day to think it all over, will you, please? That is only fair."

The door was softly pulled ajar, and the Judge glanced quickly toward the hall, and as quickly arose from his chair.

"I will see you later, my boy!" he said hastily, and quickly put his hands to his lips as he noticed the smile of the young woman in the door-way. Rod heard a soft step beside him and glanced swiftly around. Edith Arnold was dropping demurely into the seat which her father had vacated.

"I have heard the whole of your talk with dad," she began, impulsively. "I listened on purpose. Oh, I know it was not the thing to do, but I just couldn't help it! And I am so glad!"

"Glad?" echoed Rod.

"Because you are going to accept Dad's proposition!"

"But how do you know I am?"

"Principally because I ask you! There, that is said, and you can make the most of it, Mr. Independence!"

Rod was silent.

"I have made a proposition to you, and I expect a definite answer. Will you go?"

Rod stared out at the green lawn and back at the sweet face before him.

"I'll go!" he said softly.

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